

Improving Nurses' Electronic Access to Evidence to Inform Practice

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Abstract

Nurses, like other health professionals, are reliant on current evidence to inform their practice. Almost a third of nurses are employed by NGOs and other non-DHB providers and most do not have easy access to electronic databases and evidence based search engines. In 2010, a project was undertaken to enable all South Island nurses to access evidence to inform practice regardless of their practice setting.

Prior to commencing the project, a convenience survey was completed asking nurses from a variety of practice settings to describe the barriers and enablers to accessing the internet to search for evidence to inform their practice. Similar to literature on the subject, nurses stated that time, convenience and confidence in searching for evidence on-line hindered their use of this medium. This project enabled the development of an openly available website for nurses www.nursingevidence.org.nz containing a range of 'best evidence' websites and advice on how to be discerning in searching the web for evidence to inform practice. During the past 12 months information has been gained profiling the use of this website by nurses, which will be presented at the conference.

1. Introduction

Many nurses in the South Island do not have ready access to the internet in their workplace to search for evidence to support and inform their clinical decision making. Even if they do have access to the internet or an intranet, some of the greatest barriers to searching for nursing evidence includes lack of time, lack of terminals, and lack of or loss of skills in searching quickly and confidently [1]. This situation inhibits nursing innovation and confidence in questioning or proposing alternative ways of working and/or treatment.

In 2010, the New Zealand Institute of Community Health Care (NZICHC), in conjunction with the Canterbury District Health Board (CDHB) commenced a Ministry of Health funded project to develop a service that would improve nurses' use of evidence to inform their clinical practice. The project, focusing on South Island nurses, was supported by all Directors of Nursing in the region. Prior to commencing the project, an audit was completed to identify and explore the use of the internet by nurses to search for evidence and barriers to this activity.

2. Audit process

The audit was completed in 4 phases; a pre audit survey, development of the audit tool, the audit, analysis of findings and application of findings to website development.

2.1. Pre service survey

A telephone survey was conducted by the project team in January 2010. Information was obtained from individual nurses and organisations employing nurses, Directors of Nursing from both the DHB and Primary Health Providers, residential care managers, and rural and district nursing representatives throughout the South Island. This identified current sources of evidence to guide practice for nurses. It was also noted that many nurses were not hospital based, which left a number of them poorly serviced. Following advice from nurses that they did regularly access the internet at home, *Survey Monkey* was used for the pre-service audit.

2.2. Development of the audit tool

Information obtained in the telephone interview and in the literature informed the series of questions used in the tool. Links to the tool were disseminated through a South island nursing network of email addresses gathered during the initial telephone interview.

2.3. Audit findings

A total of 57 South Island nurses who worked in hospices, rest homes, government agencies and PHO's, among others completed the survey. Most were female, NZ European or other European, with 50% being in either the 42-47 or 54-59 age range. Almost two thirds had some form of postgraduate qualification and half had a post graduate certificate.

The majority of respondents (96%) found information through free access sites accessed via a search engine with 49% using this method 'often' and 75.6% used the intranet, with 'sometimes' then 'often' being the most common responses.

Consulting colleagues/health professionals and using free access websites were equally the most 'often' and 'always' used resources for nurses to gather more information, with asking patients/family and work based text books and journals used 'sometimes' or more frequently.

2.3.1. What are the barriers to sourcing evidence?

Barriers to finding information were most commonly lack of time at home (48%) and work (47%); however the intensity of the time at work barrier was higher than at home. Heavy computer use by staff was also identified as a barrier to using them for finding information at work.

Half of the respondents identified a lack of subscriptions to be a barrier 'sometimes', 'usually' or 'always'. Lack of up to date texts were identified as a barrier by 29%. Dislike of computers was never a barrier for over 90% of the respondents and no respondents highlighted that this was 'always' a barrier.

2.3.2. What type of information do the nurses look for?

Respondents most commonly looked for 'information about a condition' and 'information on condition treatment/management' with over 75% highlighting this as what they searched for 'often' and 'always'. General nursing care and government/health policy news were most frequently topics searched for 'sometimes' with 35% and 49% respectively. Over 80% of respondents looked for nursing care for specific conditions at least 'sometimes'.

2.3.3. What databases and evidence based websites do nurses use?

Of the specific nursing/health web-based resources listed in the survey question, none were extensively used, with 'sometimes' being the most common response. Over a quarter of the respondents did not have access to subscription based website services. Medline, Cinahl and Cochrane were the most commonly used with the combined 'sometimes', 'most times' and 'always' responses totalling 60%, 56% and 50% respectively. Free sites that were highlighted included other hospital websites and specialty specific bulletin boards.

2.3.4. How easy is it for the nurses to search the sites?

Most (87.5%) felt their ability to find information via a search engine such as Google was 'good' or 'very good', compared to 50% and 48% for evidence based websites and databases. Where the intranet was available, 60% of respondents felt they had a 'good' or 'very good' level of expertise in its use.

2.3.5. Where do nurses access the web from?

The majority of respondents accessed the web resources from work with 44% doing this 'most times', closely followed by from home with 43%. University/polytechnic libraries and the council library were 'never' and 'rarely' used by the majority of respondents – 69% and 96% respectively.

2.3.6. What would nurses like as a web resource?

Three questions in the survey allowed respondents to comment on the features of web resources that made them trust the content that they found useful and that they would include if they were designing a website. Regarding trustworthiness of the resource content, the organisation which created the website was the main reason cited, followed by links to or from other reputable web resources, research based content, and recommendation from a respected individual. The key features of favoured web resources were clear layout of a wide range of resources, credibility of the resources, and ease of access and availability. Availability and accessibility would have been included in any website the respondents designed, second only to ease of navigation and just ahead of nursing and New Zealand specific content.

3. Website development

During the pre-audit survey phase of the project, a group of link nurses was established, covering all South Island DHB areas and a cross section of non-DHB health providers. Over a period of eight weeks, a website (www.nursingevideance.org.nz) was developed, informed by both the pre-service audit and feedback from the link nurses. The website was first available on the internet in December 2010.

In the first quarter of 2011, the site had 1500 users with 20% returning to use the site again through the home page. Half of the users were North Islanders and 30% South Islanders. The website is now high in a Google search for 'nursing evidence', so there is also overseas interest in the site.

In September 2011, a post service implementation audit will be completed, with a similar tool being use. This process will enable further fine tuning of the website.

4. Acknowledgments

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5. References

[1] Nursing Council of New Zealand. (2010) Workforce statistics 2010. The New Zealand Nursing Workforce. A profile of Nurse Practitioners, Registered Nurses, Nurse Assistants and Enrolled Nurses 2010 .<http://www.nursingcouncil.org.nz/download/186/31march2010.pdf>