The origins of journal clubs began in the medical profession more than 100 years ago, with the first recorded journal club initiated by Sir William Osler in 1875 (Nesbitt & Barton, 2014). Journal clubs bring health professionals together to discuss research literature and apply this knowledge to clinical practice. To maintain competence and remain current with the latest evidence, a commitment to continuing professional education is required. This article describes how a successful journal club led to clinical nurses identifying a gap in their own practice, which resulted in a research project being conducted by the members of the journal club.

Journal Clubs: Engaging Clinical Nurses and Midwives in Research

Alannah L. Cooper, BNurs (Hons), RN; and Janie A. Brown, PhD, MEd, BN, RN

Abstract

It is essential that nurses and midwives can understand and critically evaluate research to ensure the delivery of high-quality evidence-based care. Journal clubs are an educational method that helps to develop research capacity and assist with bridging the gap between research and clinical practice. To maintain competence and remain current with the latest evidence, a commitment to continuing professional education is required. This article describes how a successful journal club led to clinical nurses identifying a gap in their own practice, which resulted in a research project being conducted by the members of the journal club.

Nursing and Midwifery Journal Clubs

Nursing and midwifery journal clubs are a learning method that can be employed by both students and practicing nurses and midwives to facilitate evidence-based care (Laaksonen, Paltra, Von Schantz, Ylönen, & Soini, 2013). Journal clubs can be conducted in person or virtually, with some journal clubs combining hybrid models, including online components as well as face-to-face sessions (Wilson et al., 2015). Utilizing journal clubs in nursing and midwifery education contributes to the development of skills in research appraisal, professional discussion, and applying research to clinical practice (Mattila, Rekola, Koponen, & Eriksson, 2013). In a review of the literature looking at nursing journal clubs as an effective teaching strategy for continuing education and evidence-based practice, Lachance (2014) identified a number of benefits, including allowing nurses to remain current with new research and use evidence-based practice, development of the ability to read and critically appraise research, bridging the gap between research and clinical practice, promotion of collaboration, and nurses being more receptive to evidence-based practices as a result of participation in journal clubs. It is recognized that clinically based
nurses and midwives are in an ideal position to identify research questions directly from their practice (Mitchell, Baillie, & Phillips, 2015). Therefore, engaging clinical nurses and midwives in research has the potential to improve both clinical care and help to ensure the relevance of research conducted.

BACKGROUND
Recognizing the benefits of journal clubs and the importance of clinical staff understanding and applying research literature to clinical practice, the study hospital introduced five regular journal clubs from 2012 (Brown & Boucher, 2014). The implementation of journal clubs was a nursing initiative supported by the Director of Nursing and Midwifery. The journal clubs were thought to unite nurses and midwives into a community of practice such that their shared identity would allow them to actively participate while individually and collectively developing competence in research analysis and critique (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger-Treyner & Wengen-Treyner, 2015). As suggested by Dirschl, Tornetta, and Bhandari (2003), these journal clubs were facilitated by us, the Nursing and Midwifery Research team, and conducted with nurses and midwives across a range of specialties. Groups with whom a journal club commenced included postnatal, preadmissions, clinical nurse consultants, nurse managers, and oncology. Having critiqued a systematic review of journal clubs published by Honey and Baker (2011), the frequency and time the journal clubs took place were determined by the clinical staff of each specialty that participated in a journal club. As a consequence of actively participating in journal clubs, clinical nurses and midwives at the study hospital developed the confidence and skills to critically appraise the literature and to apply this knowledge to their own practice (Brown & Boucher, 2014).

RESEARCH INITIATED THROUGH JOURNAL CLUB PARTICIPATION
During one of the Preadmissions Team journal club meetings, the research article “Preoperative chlorhexidine shower or bath for prevention of surgical site infection: A meta-analysis” (Chlebicki, Safdar, O’Horo, & Maki, 2013) was critiqued and stimulated much discussion over the use of preoperative washes and the processes in place at the study hospital. Critiquing this initial article prompted the journal club members to seek further literature in the area, causing the team to examine their own practice and current policy at the study hospital. It became apparent there were inconsistencies with the information patients received about preoperative washing, and we could not say with any degree of certainty what the patient experience of this process was. As a result, a research question was posed (Taylor & Roberts, 2007) and it was decided that a research project would be embarked upon. This provided the opportunity to identify issues with current practice, as well as an opportunity for the Preadmissions Team to further develop their research knowledge and skills through conducting their own research study with the guidance and support of the Nursing and Midwifery Research team.

The members of the Preadmissions journal club were involved in all stages of the research project (Leedy & Ormond, 2015), from developing the research proposal, submitting an application to the Human Research Ethics Committees, developing a survey; collecting, entering, and analyzing data; and, finally, disseminating the findings via conference presentations and via a manuscript publication at the completion of the project. The team undertook at literature review that informed the research proposal. The survey developed by the team considered the literature reviewed, their clinical experience, and knowledge of the study hospital processes and policy (Cummings, Kohn, & Hulley, 2013).

All the patients who participated in the study were recruited by the Preadmissions Team, providing the team the opportunity to apply their knowledge of informed participant consent in practice. After all the data were collected, the Preadmissions Team worked with the Nursing and Midwifery Research team to learn about the processes of entering and coding data (Grain & Procter, 2009) and gaining a new appreciation of the work involved in organizing the data collected for a research project. The Nursing and Midwifery Research team then went on to guide and educate the team through the data analysis process in preparation to disseminate their findings to the wider nursing and health care professions (Salthiel, Cooper, & Brown, 2016). Finally, the team was guided to develop a manuscript (Schneider & Whitehead, 2016) that was accepted for publication (Cooper et al., 2017), completing the research process. All members of the Preadmissions Team contributed through the course of the research, taking the knowledge acquired during journal clubs and applying it to their own project to investigate patient care and seek improvement. Through conducting their own research project, the journal club members had the opportunity to see research from the other side, actively participating as researchers.

The successful completion of this initial project has stimulated a second research project, in which interventions to improve patient understanding and compliance with preoperative washes will be implemented. This demonstrates that actually undertaking research has led to a sustained change in thinking about the importance of research in these journal club members and that clinical
nurses can develop the ability to shape and apply research to improve patient care and practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that organizations support the commencement of journal clubs specifically for nurses and midwives and commit the time and human resources needed to allow these clubs to thrive. The example provided here demonstrates how dedicating 1 hour every 6 weeks and providing an experienced facilitator can promote an improved understanding of research processes and lead to the evaluation of research for utilization in practice. Further, our experience indicates that journal clubs, initiated for clinical nurses and midwives, have the potential to increase the participation of nurses and midwives in evidence generation.

In our experience, it is best to begin a new journal club with an initial session that outlines what a journal club is, the purpose of a journal club, and a discussion of the expectations of journal club participants. In this session, the aspirations participants hold for journal club are established, as well as the practical aspects such as frequency, timing, and location of future journal clubs. Tailoring each journal club to the interests of the group is vital to engaging the nurses and midwives who take part. Having a facilitator has been key to the success of our journal clubs by ensuring variety in the articles selected so that differing methods and methodologies are explored. Feedback from the nurses and midwives who participate in our journal clubs has indicated that having an experienced facilitator is important in assisting their understanding of articles (Brown & Boucher, 2014). The facilitator provides journal club members with the article to be reviewed at least 1 week before the next journal club, which gives journal club members an opportunity to read the article prior to the meeting. In all our journal clubs, we use an appraisal tool developed by Ingham-Broomfield (2014), which is designed specifically for nurses to assist in the systematic analysis and critique of a research paper.

Journal clubs have the potential to support other indirect outcomes. Anecdotally, many journal club members have also engaged in postgraduate education and have found the skills gained in journal club useful in their studies. One of the facilitators received external leadership recognition, being awarded the Excellence in Nursing and Midwifery Research Award in 2015, nominated by the organization where these journal clubs are held. The facilitators have also been invited to commence journal clubs in other sites, using the proven formula described previously.

CONCLUSION

Journal clubs can have substantial benefits for nurses and midwives who participate, empowering them to not only critically evaluate research but also to recognize gaps in practice and proactively address and improve the delivery of patient care at a local level. More emphasis needs to be placed on the importance of research in nurses and midwives continuing education to ensure evidence-based care is practiced. Hospitals and other employers of nurses and midwives should support and facilitate journal clubs and nursing research, which will in turn benefit those organizations and improve patient care.

REFERENCES


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