

Nursing research in Scotland: Why it is important and what support is needed

Introduction

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) Scotland believes that patients and the public have the right to expect their care to be based on the best available research evidence. As nurses play a pivotal role in delivering health and social care, research on nursing practice and key nursing issues is essential to ensure continuous improvement and safe, effective and evidence-based health and social care for the people of Scotland. RCN Scotland calls on all those involved to invest in and fully support nursing research.

Throughout this document, the term 'nurses' refers to nurses registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council.

Nursing research: why is it important?

- Nurses' frontline role puts them in a unique position to reflect the needs and concerns of patients and the public. Encouraging nurses to lead and contribute to research keeps research activity focused on patient care and the needs of our health service. It also helps support meaningful engagement with patients, carers and families.
- Nursing research can make health and social care more cost-effective. By encouraging ongoing improvements to practice and exploring new approaches it can improve the productivity and efficiency of the NHS and other health and social care organisations.
- Nurses work in a wide range of roles to improve the health of the people of Scotland. By drawing on nursing research to improve their practice they directly support the delivery of key health outcomes as well as Scottish Government objectives, indicators and targets on issues such as public health, health inequalities and early years interventions.
- Fully resourced nursing research in priority areas of practice improves the quality of care given to patients and so increases public confidence in health and social care services.
- Nursing research equips nurses with the knowledge and analytical skills they need to make informed decisions and contribute effectively to new developments, from individual improvements in practice to the wholesale redesign of services.
- Nursing research and evidence implementation are essential parts of the education and training of Scotland's existing and future nursing workforce.

Nursing research: what support is needed?

RCN Scotland believes that the developments set out below are critical if nursing research in Scotland is to have the maximum impact and benefit for patients and the public. These developments require action from health and social care providers and employers, the Scottish Government, those who fund and commission research and nurses and nurse researchers themselves.

1. Nursing research and evidence-based practice must be at the heart of professional nursing standards and recognised by all those involved as fundamental to high quality, safe and effective practice.
2. Employers must recognise research and evidence-based practice as an integral part of nursing activity.
3. The breadth and range of nursing expertise must influence the commissioning and funding of health and social care research.
4. Investment in and support for nursing research is needed from all those involved.
5. Nurse researchers must be fully involved in relevant decision making within key national and local funding bodies.
6. Partnerships must be developed to enable sharing of good practice and to ensure that nursing research across Scotland is robust and genuinely embedded in practice and service improvement. In particular, research partnerships between universities and nurses in service delivery should be explored.
7. The development of a national clinical academic research career pathway must be fully taken advantage of, in order to support greater numbers of nurses to become capable of and actively involved in research. This would include specific training and research opportunities for nurses at all levels of the national career framework in order to ensure that research is genuinely embedded in practice in Scotland.
8. A strong, independent and nurse-led group of nursing research leaders (or 'professoriate') must be developed and fully supported to lead and drive research developments in priority areas for nursing, healthcare and economic growth in Scotland. They will provide leadership on strategic research and development and encourage aspiring nurse researchers.
9. Research leaders must enable nursing to make the most of the opportunities presented by the Chief Scientist Office's recent research strategy *Investing in Research: Improving Health*.
10. Mechanisms must be developed so that health and social care providers can capitalise on the expertise of nursing academics and researchers.

Conclusion

Nursing research offers real benefits for patients, the public, health providers and employers, the Scottish Government, nursing as a profession and individual practitioners. The measures set out above will enable Scotland to continue to benefit from continuously improving, high quality, safe and effective health and social care.