

Raising the profile of nursing research

The RCN's annual nursing research conference is its second largest event after Congress. Ann McMahon argues that research is every nurse's business

Imagine you are at a dinner party and someone starts talking about some medical research that has just hit the headlines. No one would raise an eyebrow because never does a week go by without the media picking up on some medical research report. Imagine the same scenario but in this case someone starts talking about nursing research. You would probably get a very different response. 'Nursing? Research? What would nurses research?'

The recent landmark RCN publication *Defining Nursing* states: 'While compassionate care is important, compassionate but ill-informed care may be harmful.' It is for this very reason that the RCN Research Society believes that 'research is every nurse's business' and that it is important to raise the profile of nursing research at every opportunity and at every level. And not just within the profession. To ensure that knowledge continues to be generated to inform practice and shape health policies, it is also important to raise awareness of the contribution of nursing research among the general public, policymakers and those who fund research.

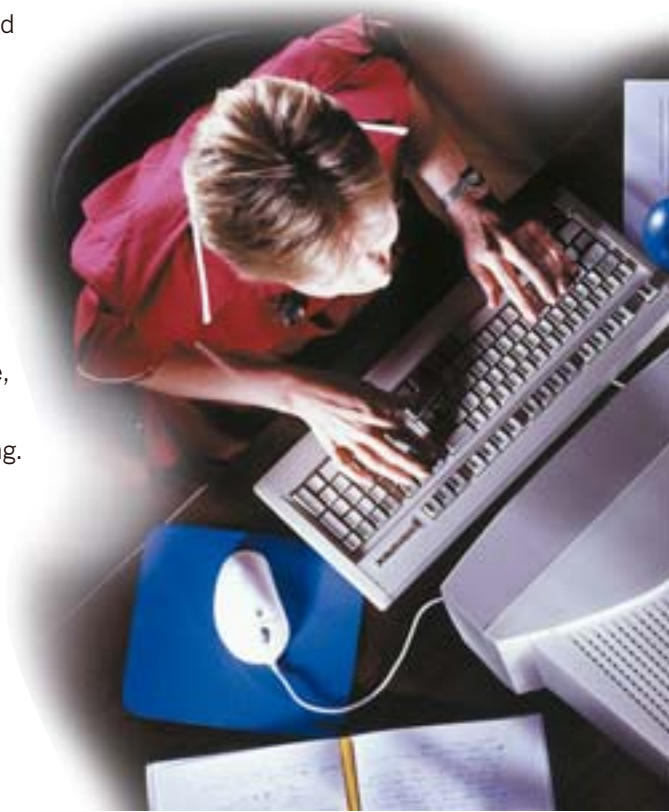
Annual conference

One of the key international showcases for nursing research is the RCN's annual international nursing research conference, the second largest event on the RCN calendar after Congress. This year it was held in Cambridge and more than 600 delegates from many countries attended the three-day event. As well as plenary presentations, more than 200 concurrent sessions and 85 poster presentations, there was a vibrant fringe programme where current issues in nursing research were discussed and debated. In

Cambridge this year, fringe events included 'Getting Published' and 'RCN Guidance on Research Ethics'. The importance of the nursing research presented at the conference has been celebrated by the nursing media for many years now. For example, the *Nursing Standard* now devotes several pages to disseminating the findings of the research presented. Equally, the RCN R&D co-ordinating centre website offers details of plenary papers and fringe activity for those who are unable to get to the conference itself. The potential of webcasting future plenary presentations is currently under investigation.

For a number of years now, considerable effort has gone into raising the profile of nursing research through the wider media. There have been notable successes this year. For example, research on self-harm among young people carried out by Tom Clarke, a clinical nurse specialist for South West London and St George's Mental Health NHS Trust, was profiled exclusively on the BBC Six O'clock News during the Cambridge conference.

Tom's research showed that young girls between 10 and 15 were four times more likely to resort to self-harm than boys. It also demonstrated that a large proportion of self-harming young people, girls especially, had been victims of bullying. From a sample of 164 boys and girls aged between 10 and 15 who attended two general hospitals on



the east London/Essex border Tom identified alarming levels of distress. Some of the factors associated with deliberate self-harm for the 117 girls and 47 boys were recent exposure to self-harm by peers or family members, drug abuse, depression, anxiety and low self-esteem.

A study calling for more training and a more co-ordinated multi-agency response in cases of domestic violence also attracted media attention. Media interest was raised when the research contributed to emerging policy debates in the field. The press in Scotland picked up on the child abuse research as it coincided with the launch of a policy document on child abuse from the Scottish Executive. The lesson here is that when aiming to raise the profile of nursing and nursing research in particular it is imperative that nurses and researchers have a close eye on national policy developments. Equally, however, it is important to ensure that nurses continue to research important issues and not just those that have a high media profile.

Next year's conference will be held in Belfast from 8-11 March and promises to be an excellent event. The list of accepted abstracts will be available on the conference website at the beginning of December.

Despite all this good work, the reality is that not everyone believes that research is every nurse's business. Where some organisations are very supportive of research and development in nursing, others are less so. And while some nurses clearly value the contribution of research, others remain sceptical. In order to promote an environment that supports nursing research, the RCN Research Society developed a position statement Promoting Excellence in Care through Research and Development. Here they have identified who plays a part in creating the right environment for nursing research to flourish. And the responsibilities of the individual nurse, health care providers and higher education institutions are singled out for



particular attention. Organisations including the City Hospitals in Belfast, where Professor Brendan McCormack is leading a programme of research and development activities, are cited as examples of good practice in research and development in nursing.

To complement the position statement, an interactive website has been created where further examples of good practice can be posted. From here there is a link to the RCN Discussion Zone where relevant issues can be debated.

Nursing research in Europe

This year the RCN Research Society has also been active in raising the profile of nursing research in the European arena and exploring the potential of tapping into the large European research funding streams. It has published the proceedings of a colloquium where current opportunities and recent initiatives were discussed. Their next step is to develop a lobbying strategy in partnership with the RCN R&D coordinating centre, under the auspices of the RCN forums political leadership programme and in collaboration with the RCN International Office.

Nursing research is ultimately about improving health and improving care. It is essential to the delivery of compassionate, informed care. It is therefore important to raise the profile of nursing research to ensure that new knowledge is generated to inform practice and shape health policies. It is equally important to promote excellence in care in a culture where research and development can flourish. And this has to be done locally within the workplace, nationally and internationally, as well as at dinner parties!

Further information

RCN annual research conference:
www.man.ac.uk/rcn/rs/conf.htm

Examples of good practice:
www.man.ac.uk/rcn/promoting-excellence