City Research Online

City St George's, University of London

Citation: Simpson, A. (2014). Review: Exploration of the effects of peer teaching of research on students in an undergraduate nursing programme. Journal of Research in Nursing, 19(5), pp. 431-433. doi: 10.1177/1744987114535876

This is the accepted version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version. To cite this item please consult the publisher's version.

Permanent repository link: https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/5640/

Link to published version: https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987114535876

Copyright and Reuse: Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, unless otherwise indicated, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way. For full details of reuse please refer to City Research Online policy.

City Research Online: http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/ publications@citystgeorges.ac.uk

Review: Exploration of the effects of peer teaching of research on students in an undergraduate nursing programme

Alan Simpson
Professor of Collaborative Mental Health Nursing, School of Health Sciences,
City University London, UK

Nurses and their healthcare colleagues work in an increasingly complex arena shaped by medical advances, demands for clinical effectiveness and cost efficiencies, increasing specialisation, rising patient expectations and major demographic changes. As a result, there has been a rapid expansion and funding of research on and about health and health services that requires doctors, nurses and other health professionals to be investigators, participants and perhaps most importantly critical users of research. This places a particular importance and challenge on the teaching about research and evidence-based practice in the nursing curriculum (McCurry and Martins, 2010).

Peer teaching or tutoring, where fellow students take on the role of teaching their peers about a topic, could be an innovative approach to ensuring nurse students are aware of the importance of research in nursing and healthcare. The reviewed study first of all provides a very useful overview of peer teaching across the healthcare educational setting and secondly reports on the evaluation of a peer-teaching initiative for undergraduate nurses learning about research.

As outlined in the reviewed study, historically there has been a concern at the failure of practitioners to ensure their practice is in line with current evidence-based guidelines and there continue to be concerns about the significant time lapse between the publication of research results and the uptake or implementation of results in healthcare practice. A time lag of 17 years being the commonly quoted gap, although the accuracy or usefulness of such figures has been thoughtfully challenged (Morris et al., 2011).

The challenges evident in ensuring that research evidence informs and changes clinical practice have led to the development of Implementation Science, the scientific study of methods to promote the uptake of research findings into routine healthcare in clinical, organisational or policy contexts. This exciting development has been accompanied by the funding of research chairs and fellowships and the emergence of journals focused on implementation studies.

Part of the process of implementation of research requires nurses to access, understand and critique research. The reviewed study took place in Scotland, with fourth year honours nursing students presenting their research work to third year students. This included literature reviews, critiques of papers and research proposals. Evaluation of the initiative involved questionnaires to the student learners and focus groups with the student tutors.

The reviewed study produced some promising results. In general, there appeared to be moderate to high satisfaction with the peer teaching across the range of students. Peer teaching was felt to improve learning and clarify understanding of research and the research process. It was also reported to make research more accessible to students and help them appreciate connections between theory and practice and the delivery of nursing care. Just what the matron ordered.

And, undoubtedly, the experience of presenting and teaching about their own research provided the peer tutors with a massive boost in confidence in their ability to talk about and discuss research and research processes. This reinforces the idea that peer teaching is a good method to increase students' learning and confidence in a subject and should be encouraged more widely.

There was some suggestion within the evaluation that learning from and alongside one's peers may encourage or enable a level of engagement with the topic which is not as achievable through regular lecturing staff. Student learners indicated that the peer 'tutors' had a better understanding than tutors of the problems encountered by students in learning about research, perhaps suggestive of greater empathy with their peers. Such a supposition is worthy of detailed investigation as, if true, this has major implications for teaching and learning.

Whilst an interesting study that stimulates consideration of the value and potential of peer teaching, there are a number of limitations. First, peer teaching is not compared to any other approach. As a result, we do not know whether peer teaching is more or less effective than teaching by established lecturers, or by experienced research staff. An exciting consideration might be the involvement of service user researchers as co-tutors (Simpson et al., 2014).

Second, whilst students report that their knowledge of research and research processes has advanced, this has not been tested in any way and it would be interesting to explore whether such teaching leads to improved research dissertations amongst nursing students. Even better would be to conduct a longitudinal study of nurse students to explore whether exposure to different teaching methods has any impact on their engagement with and use of research evidence in their practice once qualified.

In a study in the United States that explored the use of traditional and innovative approaches for teaching research to undergraduate nurse students, results indicated a preference for active learning assignments, quizzes, clinical nurse researcher presentations, and collaboration with clinical course assignments (McMurray and Martins, 2010). Further investigation of peer teaching alongside other innovative approaches to teaching research in larger, high-quality studies should be actively encouraged and ideally undertaken in collaboration between universities and service provider partners.

References

McCurry MK and Martins DC (2010) Teaching undergraduate nursing research: A comparison of traditional and innovative approaches for success with millennial learners. Journal of Nursing Education 49(5): 276–279.

Morris ZS, Wooding S and Grant J (2011) The answer is 17 years, what is the question: Understanding time lags in translational research. Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine 104: 510.

Simpson A, Barlow S, Cox L, et al. (2014) Adding SUGAR: Collaborating with service users and carers in mental health nursing research. Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Health Services 52(1): 22–30.

Alan Simpson is Professor of Collaborative Mental Health Nursing in the School of Health Sciences, City University London, where he leads on mental health nursing research with a special focus on service user and carer involvement in practice and research.