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Clinical Nurses' Experiences Conducting Nursing Research

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As a Magnet®-designated organization we are duty-bound to support nursing research. However, it is not because of this obligation that UCSDH nurses engage in research. The Professional Practice Model designed by our own clinical nurses includes research as a core value.¹ The structural support provided by UCSDH includes the Evidence-Based Practice/Research Council, a full-time nurse scientist, a medical librarian dedicated to nursing and allied health, immediate access to evidence through the medical library, and a virtual network of over 200 nurses interested in conducting research and scholarly activities. Nurses may conduct research as a project for advancement through the clinical ladder resulting in a raise and promotion. For each of our last two Magnet designations, we have been assessed as an exemplar in supporting nurses with research. We can be proud of the fact that UCSDH nurses conduct as much research and publish as many manuscripts as organizations directly affiliated with a school of nursing. In this article three clinical nurses reflect on their experience conducting research for the first time, abstracted from an article they recently published in *Applied Nursing Research*.² Heather Abraham provides a video testimony of her experiences conducting research as a clinical nurse.



Judy E. Davidson DNP RN MCCM FAAN serves as a nurse scientist for the Division of Nursing and a research scientist for the Department of Psychiatry School of Medicine, UC San Diego. In this role, she supports nurses and others with project development, presentation and publication skills. Her own research centers around research wellness and clinician suicide.



Shervin Esfahani, BSN, RN Clinical Nurse 3GH ICU

is a CN II on JMC 3GH ICU and Code Blue RN for JMC. After graduating from the ADN program at Riverside City College, he started his nursing career as a new graduate RN in Thornton ICU in 2012. He earned UCSD Rookie of the Year honors in 2013 and his Bachelor's from University of Texas, Arlington. Shervin, Cassia Yi and Dr. Kyle Edmonds began the Advance Care Planning taskforce, which later became the Advance Care Planning Committee. He has presented his clinical ladder project surrounding Goals of Care Conversations at the 2016 NICHE

Conference and published his work in *Critical Care Nurse* in August of 2020. You can honor his work by contemplating what a good death looks like to you, sharing your end of life wishes with your loved ones, completing your own advance directive and helping your patients complete their own advance care planning.

Conducting a qualitative research study was very different than the fast-paced technologically-laden environment I thrive in. However, the glaring lack of advance care planning, that often critical care nurses feel the brunt of, sparked my desire to do something about this issue. I had access to thousands of post-it notes describing what gives people meaning in life received from volunteer passers-by of billboards placed in the hospitals and clinics. The availability of this data coupled with the desire to understand the human psyche in relation to life, priorities, and values, provided an opportunity for research that was too valuable to forego.

Prior to the start of the research, I took a search strategies class. This class provided an overview of nursing research, how to set up and search for articles, and other relevant information such as Boolean terms and search filters. After meeting with our librarian to help put these skills to work, I met with our nurse scientist and discussed strategies, what the research process might look like, considerations relevant to the plan and next steps. I also completed a required investigator training program online which outlined details about conducting ethical research.

Conducting research is a dynamic process, which requires the clinical nurse to be flexible but also

steadfast. Much like taking online courses, remaining self-disciplined to complete next steps in a timely manner will help mitigate the unavoidable and unforeseen setbacks and delays that are inherent in the research process. Going through the process can also present mental disappointments that will require you to reach out to mentors that will reassure you these ups and downs are normal during the journey. Make sure to find a balance between your bedside role, days devoted to the research, and days that feed your soul so you can persevere during the frustrations that will be felt. In conducting research, you must also get to know research. Immersing yourself in articles that critique, explain and delineate the types, approaches and methods similar to what you are doing will help you understand how to apply the knowledge you are gathering and present the data in a way that respects the discipline of research.

Conducting the research helped me step outside the linear applications of my background in critical care, where I usually flex with my left brain to infuse the imagination and art of my right brain usually reserved for leisure. It was liberating to use so much creativity during the research process; seeing the patterns form in the data and piecing them together, discussing the relationships, and folding it all back

into theoretical paradigms. It was enlightening work, but still work. Our coding sessions lasted three hours each with a series of seven sessions prior to completing the analysis.

Recruiting help with data analysis from nursing students and mingling them with my mentors provided a rich diversity of backgrounds, cultures, generations, and personalities that allowed the qualitative coding to go further than I could have imagined. After naming themes/categories in the first round of analysis with only three researchers, the data proved to be much deeper and more diverse through the inspection of a larger pool of researchers. Many memes, phrases, and social phenomena were revealed by having dissimilar researchers reviewing the data. In addition, this allowed us to cross-reference and ask one another if we were on track in order to ensure the quality of the analysis. The number of topics related to what participants shared as bringing their life meaning was expansive. Reading the responses was often uplifting, sometimes thought provoking and heart wrenching, while all together a uniquely beautiful experience to share amongst us researchers.



Tamara Norton, BSN, RN

is a CN II on JMC 3GH ICU and Code Blue RN for JMC. After graduating from the ADN program at Riverside City College, he started his nursing career as a new graduate RN in Thornton ICU in 2012. He earned UCSD Rookie of the Year honors in 2013 and his Bachelor's from University of Texas, Arlington. Shervin, Cassia Yi and Dr. Kyle Edmonds began the Advance Care Planning taskforce, which later became the Advance Care Planning Committee. He has presented his clinical ladder project surrounding Goals of Care Conversations at the 2016 NICHE Conference and published his work in

Critical Care Nurse in August of 2020. You can honor his work by contemplating what a good death looks like to you, sharing your end of life wishes with your loved ones, completing your own advance directive and helping your patients complete their own advance care planning.

If you asked five years ago what I would be doing as a clinical nurse, I would have never said, "I'll be conducting research". My involvement in research was stimulated by doing a practice change project through the American Association of Critical Care Nurses.³ I read a great deal of research about ICU diaries for that project. We published an article about our change project and once complete, I

had truly caught the research bug!

I found a topic that had never been studied: the nurses' experience with writing in a patient diary. The research design and methods would be a descriptive phenomenological qualitative study using semi-structured interviews.⁴ I performed interviews with semi-structured leading questions that were audiotaped, downloaded and transcribed. After only a few interviews I learned more

about how to improve the diary project than I could have imagined. The knowledge learned through conducting this study was immediately applicable to practice.

I never imagined I would be conducting research as a clinical nurse. The research has opened up doors I did not think I would ever walk through. Conducting research has built self-confidence and a sense of pride that, with mentorship, I am able to go further than I never dreamed in my career. As a novice researcher my advice to clinical nurses learning to perform research is to find yourself a mentor. For myself, I was fortunate to work at an institution who employed a full time nurse scientist. She was able to work with me and guide me in the research process. I would also suggest a librarian. The medical librarian will help to set up alerts to receive articles related to your research which helps keep the literature review current. Attempting to perform research can, at first, be intimidating, however, with the support of a few individuals the research will become straightforward even to a novice clinical nurse.



Laura Martin, BSN, RN, CCRN, TNCC, CMC, CSC

graduated from The Ohio State University with a BSN in Nursing. She has worked intensive care nursing for 36 years, her areas of specialization include: Cardiovascular Intensive Care - Heart/Lung Transplant and Cardiac Surgery, including Pulmonary Arterial Thrombectomy. She works full time at UC San Diego Medical Center where she is trained as an ECMO Specialist (VA and VV ECMO). She also works in Trauma ICU and has a certification as a Trauma Nurse Critical Care (TNCC). She belongs to AACN and has certifications as Critical Care Registered Nurse

(CCRN), Cardiac Medicine Certificate (CMC) and Cardiac Surgery Certificate (CSC). Laura has lived in San Diego for over 30 years and raised 4 boys to men. She loves her career at UCSDH and her wonderful team!

I am a seasoned nurse working in the cardiovascular ICU with over 36 years of critical care nursing experience, including managing patients receiving ECMO. This is my first research project, and in the

beginning I had feelings of insecurity and hindrance with myself. I wasn't sure that I was able to do such a project or undertaking. It felt overwhelming and difficult.

With the assistance of the nurse

scientist, I was offered guidance and mentorship on a level that helped this new chapter in my nursing career blossom. I started to build a journey of expanding knowledge with growth on a personal and professional level. In my study I am exploring how nurse ECMO specialists, physicians and perfusionists come to their decision about which patients are good candidates for ECMO and compare that to prediction tools. I wonder whether we may capture early deterioration and early notification with possible cannulation by allowing the ECMO nurse specialists to have a voice in patient selection. I'm hoping through this research that we may gain an understanding of each other's perspectives building teamwork and respect.



Heather Abraham, MSN, MPA, RN, CCRN

is a clinical nurse on JMC 5H - Neuro Progressive Care Unit. She earned her BSN from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh; her MSN from the University of Mobile, Mobile, AL; and her MPA from Troy State University, Troy, AL. Heather began her nursing career as a Navy Nurse Corps officer then transitioned to civilian nursing where she's held a variety of nursing leadership and clinical nurse positions. Heather has completed her first year of the PhD program at University of California Irvine. Her areas of research interest are human-animal interaction, adolescent mental health,

and obesity. To: Her areas of research interest are human-animal interaction, Post-COVID Syndrome (PCS), and adolescent mental health.



Click to listen to Heather's reflection about her research on patient's own pet visitation.

Or visit:

<https://uci.zoom.us/rec/play/JpiQW2UUqgXFdUQr0EzL7wTvgUSoEi2o-rPbMG8xVk05hhAOxlSo5ofwmDyd44sbET7T741sXNh332eX.UpJ6kVPD1vzpn5cY>

CONCLUSION

These reflections provide clear testimony to the challenges and pride associated with conducting research for the first time. It takes courage to push past preconceived notions of career-limits to conduct research. Once completed, the success generates pride and a feeling of empowerment. Resources are necessary⁵ and available to support nurses in conducting their first

studies at UCSDH. Nurses at UCSDH have proven themselves ready and willing to address the gaps in evidence by conducting research to advance practice.

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