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## Developing a culture of nursing research through clinical-academic partnership

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## PRACTICE DEVELOPMENT PAPER

# Developing a culture of nursing research through clinical-academic partnership

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## Abstract

Evidence based practice is essential to advanced practice nursing, enabling the delivery of quality care and improved patient outcomes. As the name suggests, it requires healthcare decisions to be based on the best available and current evidence. Advanced practice nurses need astute critical analysis skills to appraise the evolving literature, and require research skills to lead on scientific inquiry and develop the profession. Yet, advanced practice nurses may not recognize themselves as research leaders. Participation in a journal club can promote evidence-based practice, improve clinician's critical thinking skills, and expose members to different research methodologies, however, nurses continue to face barriers to participation in these clubs. Establishing a clinical-academic partnership appears to be both mutually beneficial for clinicians and academics and is a significant enabler in the sustainability and functioning of the club through sharing expertise and experience. A supportive workplace culture is favourable to research utilization and knowledge translation. This paper outlines the role, practicalities, challenges, and benefits of setting up a hybrid urology journal and research club for advanced practice nurses in a clinical-academic partnership.

## KEYWORDS

advanced nurse practitioner, advanced practice nursing, evidence based practice, journal club, nurse-led research, urology

## What is currently known?

- Leadership and research are fundamental elements of advanced nursing practice in the delivery of evidence based nursing care.
- Challenges exist for nurses to develop their critical thinking skills and keep clinicians up to date with current literature.

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**What does this article add?**

- A clinical-academic partnership supports the development and sustainability of a research culture with urological advanced nurse practitioners.
- We propose a systematic process to establish and sustain a hybrid journal and research club.

## 1 | BACKGROUND

Advanced Nurse Practitioners (ANPs) and Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) more broadly, aim to deliver evidence-based best practice for their patients, underpinned by research. These advanced nursing roles are continuously evolving within an ever-changing clinical environment with more of an emphasis on the application of critical appraisal skills and translation of new knowledge into practice. In Ireland, the national nursing regulatory body, Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI) Advanced Practice (Nursing) Standards and Requirements<sup>1</sup> assert the role of research and leadership to inform clinical decision-making to enhance patient-centred care as core elements within its domains of advanced practice.<sup>1</sup> Internationally, 'research' and 'leadership' are recognized 'pillars' of advanced practice.<sup>2</sup> Nurse leaders are crucial to the development of a research culture, which establishes evidence-based practice and strengthens nurses' scientific attitudes and capacity.<sup>3</sup> APNs should not only continue to develop critical analysis skills to inform evidence-based practice through consultation with the literature, but also improve research skills and competence to conduct nurse-led research.

However, APNs report challenges in identifying themselves as research leaders.<sup>4</sup> Engaging in a journal club can improve this perception. Research and journal clubs can support and enable nurse practitioners to engage in research and nurse-led research in ways that are accessible whilst balancing working in a busy clinical area.<sup>5</sup> In particular, they provide clinicians with the opportunity to identify and discuss relevant research articles on topics of interest that are applicable to practice, whilst examining their own practice and sharing ideas and insights in an informal setting. In September 2021, an ANP led urology nursing journal and research club was established, creating a workplace culture conducive to evidence based practice (EBP), research utilization, and knowledge translation.<sup>6</sup> This paper reflects on the successful establishment and implementation of our journal and research club through a clinical-academic partnership.

## 2 | ROLE OF JOURNAL AND RESEARCH CLUBS

Participating in a journal club is reported to increase clinicians' critical reading and thinking skills while keeping participants up to date with current literature.<sup>7</sup> Developing research capacity is paramount to the success of evidence-based healthcare, and journal clubs are an integral component of this concept.<sup>8</sup> The ability to critique and decipher

what is useful from the explosion in research is an important skill for clinicians.<sup>9</sup> Journal clubs are a well-recognized method of promoting evidence-based clinical practice, learning, and knowledge accrual within the health care setting.<sup>10</sup> They provide a space that allows members the opportunity to share knowledge and engage with research. Additionally, journal clubs may offer a platform for participants to improve their leadership, debating, and teaching skills.<sup>9</sup>

As an organized educational meeting, journal and research clubs aim to promote the acquisition of transferable knowledge across clinical practice yielding influential change. Professional evolution and empowerment are credible benefits exhibited by participants, positively transforming their attitudes and confidence in applying research knowledge to practice. Furthermore, exposure to varied research papers allows participants an opportunity to increase their awareness about research methodologies and their potential impact on clinical practice.<sup>11</sup>

The context of the journal and research club empowers participants to improve their research and critical appraisal skills in a safe, supported learning environment. This supported learning environment promotes valuable discourse relating to challenges and issues within the clinical field.<sup>8,11,12</sup>

## 3 | CHALLENGES TO ESTABLISHING A RESEARCH CULTURE

The challenges to establishing, participating, and sustaining a journal and research club, and fostering a research culture, are well documented in the literature and are outlined in Table 1.

**TABLE 1** Challenges associated with establishing a research culture

- Lack of time
- Lack of research knowledge or confidence (e.g., Statistics, grant applications, etc.)
- Lack of financial resources
- Feeling intimidated by research
- Lack of leadership support
- A nursing culture that does not support nursing research
- Lack of experienced nursing research mentors or academic collaboration
- Lack of institutional research infrastructure
- Nurse education level
- Lack of interest
- Nursing research not being a priority
- Lack of a nursing research committee

18,19

**TABLE 2** Practical steps to establish and maintain the journal and research

Step	Rationale	Action
Identify and invite interested members.	Only those interested and motivated will participate.	As an initial step, the ANP's whose role includes research met and agreed to form the club. We also invited a senior nursing lecturer from the hospitals' partner academic institution and established a clinical academic partnership.
Find a suitable physical location.	You need a place to meet which has adequate space for the size of your group and resources to facilitate the club.	We identified a large room that was unused during the planned meetings, which had a usable personal computer (PC).
Enable a virtual resource for those working off-site to attend.	This promotes participation by members offsite from the hospital group or the academic partner in the university, eliminating the need to travel. It also promotes attendance and sustainability. <sup>38</sup>	We set up Zoom (you can use one of many alternatives) to enable access for off-site participants.
Identify the time, duration, and frequency of meetings that suit most of the participant.	Participants are busy practitioners with heavy clinical and academic caseloads and the journal and research club should complement and enhance the existing roles.	We agreed on a 2 weekly meeting schedule, on a Thursday, lasting for 1 h. The meetings alternate between a Journal Club and a Research Club.
Adapt and adopt critiquing frameworks from journal club toolkits and develop a TOR.	There is no need to invent the wheel. There are resources already available mentioned earlier in this paper that can guide your process.	We reviewed and adapted the existing toolkits and utilized what works best for our club. Writing TOR structures the meetings and governs the club.
Keep track of your activities.	Keep a record of your meetings including the papers reviewed and the outcomes. This provides evidence of meetings held and may be used for Continuing Education Units (CEUs) if approved by the institution or regulator. Keep track of research ideas, and research projects. Be mindful of GDPR and confidentiality.	Use an excel spreadsheet or word document with a table to record the date, participants present, actions (if a journal club; who led it; what paper was critiqued; If it was a research meeting, document what occurred e.g., idea generation, stage of a study, updates, etc.). If your organization has a shared drive, set up an administration folder for your records, or use Google Drive, Microsoft One drive, Dropbox or a similar service, which has some free storage options.
Make it easy—communication is key.	Clear, consistent communication about dates of the next meeting, the type of meeting (Journal or Research), and who is leading the discussion will help maintain the longevity of the club.	We use communication tools such as email and have set up a club WhatsApp group to send out reminders of meetings and Zoom invitations.
Have a facilitator.	It is important to have an overall leader or facilitator who takes overall responsibility for the functioning of the club. <sup>39</sup> This may be the person whose idea it was to set up the club, or may be voted upon and can be rotated by agreement (Set it out in your TOR).	The facilitator will send out reminders, encourage the members, maintain the organizations database, and record the outcomes of the meetings.

A study investigating barriers to participation in an online nursing journal club highlighted time as the greatest barrier.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, choosing topics that are relevant and have a close application to the participant's clinical area, and team members perceived ownership of the club may promote its success.<sup>13,14</sup> Support from management and ensuring an online format is available, are proposed methods for overcoming barriers.<sup>15</sup> Other factors reported to improve sustainability include the consistent use of critical appraisal tools and group-based critical appraisal.<sup>16</sup> Another important aspect is the participation of an academic facilitator or having access to research experts,<sup>14,16,17</sup> indeed in one study it was identified as the top facilitator.<sup>18</sup> Establishing a clinical-academic collaboration or partnership is a mutually beneficial key resource for supporting and promoting scientific nursing enquiry,

overcoming clinician and academic barriers to engaging in scientific inquiry, and improving patient outcomes.<sup>19</sup>

## 4 | OUR APPROACH AND PROCESS

We developed and implemented our journal and research club considering the documented challenges and enablers previously discussed, and adopted a pragmatic approach to ensure the club's sustainability.

We reviewed several resources that guide the establishment of a journal club including:

- Nursing Times Journal Club Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)<sup>20</sup>
- Yale New Havens 'Nursing Journal Club Facilitators Workbook'<sup>21</sup>

- 'Nursing Journal Clubs and the Clinical Nurse Specialist'<sup>22</sup>
- Oncology Nursing Society's 'A How-to Guide Designing & Creating a Journal Club for Oncology Nurses'.<sup>23</sup>

We then developed terms of reference (TOR) for our club and adopted relevant elements from the resources mentioned above. The TOR is an essential document to guide the governance of the club, setting out the frequency, location, duration, type of meeting, rotation of members who will lead on paper discussions and other important housekeeping rules.

We currently have five urology ANP members from within our hospital group (Saolta), and two academics from the hospital (University Hospital Galway) partner academic institution (University of Galway). The club is urology focused, and we have limited our club membership to no more than 10 members to ensure that administration remains manageable.<sup>20</sup> Table 2 outlines the practical steps we undertook to establish and govern the club.

## 5 | DISCUSSION

Reciprocal clinical-academic partnerships in research as illustrated in this paper, normally arise outside of formal or informal contractual agreements.<sup>24</sup> The nurse academics (MD & LM) in the group became involved out of a mutual interest in supporting ANP research activity outside of any contractual agreement and adopting a view of research leadership as a 'commitment to supporting and developing others, and creating an environment in which they can succeed'.<sup>25</sup>(pe2)

The group has decided on a benchmark of one conference presentation and one peer-reviewed publication each year as a measure of its outputs. This can only be achieved through strong leadership and a commitment to scheduling the group's research activities at the same time on the same day each fortnight, even in the context of demanding clinical commitments. Taking a lead in developing research activity in practice is a 'champion' role of ANPs.<sup>26</sup>

The journal and research club's success can be attributed to a committed membership, an organized ANP leader, and ensuring papers discussed are focused on current issues of interest to the ANP group.<sup>27,28</sup> Collaborative arrangements between nurse academics and clinical nurse leaders can result in a better use of evidence by clinical nurse leaders.<sup>27</sup> This is illustrated in one of our journal club discussions on a systematic review on the use of Intravesical Gentamycin,<sup>29</sup> following a suggestion by one of the department's Urology consultants that this treatment should be considered for one of their patients. Guidance from the nurse academics on the methodological aspects of the systematic review helped the group reach an informed decision for their response to the Urology consultant.

The group's current research study aims to determine patients' views on their enablement following consultation and care delivered by an ANP in the outpatient/ambulatory care setting. Roles in the study have been divided among the team based on skills. For instance,

the ANP's are not involved in data cleaning resulting in maximum time efficiency and ensuring the best use of ANPs' skills.<sup>30</sup>

Barriers to research engagement among ANPs can be broadly summarized in four themes: lack of research skills, not enough time due to clinical commitments, a work culture that does not value research engagement and a lack of research mentors and resources.<sup>31</sup> These barriers have been challenged in the reciprocal clinical-academic partnership presented in this paper. Clinical responsibilities are the priority for ANPs and accommodating research activities requires persistence in scheduling. It is the very nature of clinical responsibilities taking precedence that requires the need for ANPs to schedule research activity time into the work diary each week for at least 6 months ahead. A proactive approach is essential. In addition, the presence of a positive working environment where nursing management values research activities is also central to maintaining commitment among the group. Positive workplace culture is vital for effective team working as it influences whether staff flourish or not and impacts the quality of service provided<sup>32</sup> and is essential to motivating staff. Indeed, a positive workplace culture is correlated with improved patient outcomes.<sup>33</sup>

Working and learning cannot be separated, they are synergistic. The group utilize their urology practice setting as their main source of learning and innovation, resulting in a meaningful influence on their service.<sup>32</sup> The research activities of the group represent an approach to continuous professional development (CPD) that maximizes learning at work, through work that is for work.<sup>34</sup>

Academic-practice partnership is the ideal model to support research activities among ANPs,<sup>31</sup> and it is evident that research undertaken by ANPs needs support from nurse academics.<sup>4</sup> In addition, some clinicians want academics who understand the clinical context of their research.<sup>35</sup> However, it is argued that Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) need to change their approach to the provision of CPD,<sup>36</sup> and our collaborative research illustrates how supportive academic supervision is a living approach to CPD, that can lead to increased confidence in research skills among ANPs.<sup>37</sup>

## 6 | CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper addressed the role, logistics, challenges, and benefits of setting up a hybrid journal and research club for ANPs in partnership with both clinicians and academics. It highlighted both the importance and necessity of a partnership approach in setting up and sustaining research and journal clubs in terms of developing a 'research culture' to encompass the practice of active engagement with published literature as evidence-based practitioners, in addition to the process of conducting nurse-led research. Thus, enabling clinicians to ultimately improve patient care and practice by promoting the delivery of high-quality evidence-based care through active engagement in nurse-led research, which also supports informed decision-making, and changes in practice/policy. The challenges and practicalities of setting up a journal and research club, as outlined in this paper, may be helpful to support ANPs and clinicians when

setting up their own clubs and enable them to see how beneficial these clubs are in equipping clinicians with the critical appraisal, research skills, and knowledge when navigating an ever-changing clinical arena.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Robert W. McConkey: Manuscript preparation. Therese Kelly: Manuscript preparation. Rachael Dalton: Manuscript preparation. Geraldine Rooney: Manuscript preparation. Michelle Healy: Manuscript preparation. Louise Murphy: Manuscript preparation. Maura Dowling: Manuscript preparation.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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