



Promoting Evidence-Based Practice and Healthy Work Environments

RNAO Vision backgrounder

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Evidence-based practice (EBP) is defined as, “a paradigm and life-long problem solving approach to clinical decision-making that involves the conscientious use of the best available evidence (including a systematic search for and critical appraisal of the most relevant evidence to answer a clinical question) with one’s own clinical expertise and patient values and preferences to improve outcomes for individuals, groups, communities, and systems”.¹

There is increased attention and support for the incorporation of evidence into nursing practice by researchers, organizations, and professional bodies around the world.² A primary way in which evidence is used in nursing is through the development and adoption of nursing Best Practice Guidelines (BPG). Nursing BPGs summarize the best available research and provide evidence-based recommendations for nurses working in public health, primary care, acute care, long-term care, and home care.³ These EBPs support nurses to work to their full scope of practice by equipping them with the knowledge they need to provide quality nursing care.

Widespread adoption and incorporation of evidence in nursing practice improves nurses’ knowledge,⁴ facilitates patient-centred care,⁵ enhances patient outcomes,^{6 7} reduces the occurrence of adverse events^{8 9} and costs,¹⁰ and increases patient satisfaction.¹¹ Furthermore, there is a growing understanding of the relationship between nurses’ work environments, patient outcomes and organizational and system performance.^{12 13 14} For example, there are strong associations between nurse staffing and adverse patient outcomes.^{15 16 17 18 19 20} Healthy work environments yield financial benefits to organizations by reducing absenteeism, lost productivity, organizational health-care costs and costs arising from adverse patient outcomes.^{21 22} Therefore, it is imperative that nurses be supported to work in healthy work environments and that nurses and others be provided with evidence-based tools to create and sustain healthy work environments.

RNAO is internationally recognized as a leader in advancing nursing practice by developing evidence-based resources that support nurses to create healthy work environments and make a positive impact on patient care. With funding from the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, RNAO’s signature BPG Program is focused on developing, disseminating, implementing, sustaining, monitoring and evaluating clinical and healthy work environment (HWE) BPGs.^{23 24} The BPGs translate research evidence into recommendations for point-of-care practice, health professional education and organizational policy. The BPGs aim to enhance work environments, improve the quality and consistency of care, increase access to quality services, reduce health-care costs, and maximize provider, patient, organizational and health system outcomes. To date, RNAO has published 40 clinical and 10 healthy-work environment BPGs,²⁵ six of which are considered foundational guidelines on topics of leadership, collaborative practice, workload and staffing, professionalism, embracing diversity and workplace health, safety, and well-being. RNAO’s HWE Guideline inventory has expanded to include a focus on workplace violence, conflict, fatigue and interprofessional practice.

RNAO uses a multi-pronged approach to support the dissemination, systematic, evidence-based implementation and spread of its evidence-based resources within the broader nursing practice, academic, research and political community. RNAO BPGs are regularly featured at a variety of provincial,

national, and international conferences, seminars and other events. The guidelines form the basis of numerous in-depth learning institutes, workshops, consultations and other services provided by the RNAO International Affairs and Best Practice Guidelines Centre. The Nursing Best Practice Research Centre²⁶ and other investigators conduct on-going research exploring and demonstrating the link between evidence-based nursing practice, healthy work environments, clinical excellence, and health outcomes. Furthermore, RNAO is actively engaged with many international partners, including the Guidelines International Network, in the exchange of expertise to build a stronger, evidence-based health-care community.

RNAO's involvement with integrating EBP and HWE BPGs in nursing at the systems, organizational and individual levels is extensive and has resulted in stronger outcomes for patients, providers, organizations and the system.

Supporting Evidence-Based Practice at the Systems-Level

In a 2012 report by the Canadian Council of the Federation's Health Care Innovation Working Group, clinical treatment for diabetes was highlighted as a priority health issue.²⁷ The report also made recommendations for provincial ministers to partner with RNAO in the development of a clinical practice guideline on assessing and managing foot ulcers for persons with diabetes. Since then, RNAO published the second edition of the BPG, *Assessment and Management of Foot Ulcers for People with Diabetes*^{28,29} and launched a free, international webinar series related to its development and implementation. The Council endorsed this BPG for national uptake and implementation. One of the expected outcomes from the widespread adoption of this BPG is that there will be a reduction in the number of Canadians with diabetes who suffers from the complications of foot ulcers, including infection and amputation.³⁰ Many other RNAO guidelines have been identified for national adoption through this federal initiative.

Supporting Evidence-Based Practice at the Organizational Level

The international Best Practice Spotlight Organization (BPSO®) Designation is a dynamic partnership between RNAO and health service and academic organizations that focuses on making a positive impact on patient care through EBP.³¹ Through a competitive application process, health-care organizations commit to enhancing their EBP cultures through implementation, monitoring and evaluation of BPGs using a rigorous, systematic process. RNAO's nursing order sets simplify the process of BPG implementation in health-care organizations.³² Nursing order sets are comprised of actionable evidence-based nursing interventions derived from the practice recommendations published in each guideline.³³ They can be used as a paper-based tool or integrated within an electronic medical record or clinical information system, irrespective of the vendor. RNAO also provides support to these organizations through an evidence-based implementation toolkit³⁴ and other implementation and training resources, a coaching and mentorship program, expert consultation, and knowledge exchange and networking opportunities to share best practices. In addition, RNAO provides tools to enable evaluation of guideline use through Nursing Quality Indicators for Reporting and Evaluation™ (NQuIRE™). Through NQuIRE, BPSOs submit nursing quality improvement data related to guideline-based indicators to determine the

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impact of evidence-based nursing practice on nursing practice and patient outcomes.^{35 36} BPSOs have demonstrated the positive impacts of EBP on their work environments and patient outcomes^{see 37 38 39 for examples}. To date, 73 health-care and academic organizations from across the globe, comprising over 320 sites are participating in the BPSO Designation program.

Supporting Evidence-Based Practice at the Point-of-Care

The RNAO Best Practice Champions Network® is made up of thousands of nurses and other health-care professionals who are passionate about EBP and improving work environments and health care in their organization. Network members, appropriately named “Best Practice Champions,” participate in a one-day orientation workshop, designed to provide them with numerous tools and strategies to champion the implementation of clinical and healthy-work environment BPGs in their organization. RNAO supports Champions in their ongoing commitment to enhance the uptake and spread of EBP through a variety of resources, including E-bulletins, newsletters, social networking, regular knowledge sharing forums, workshops, seminars and funding opportunities to support further education and networking. In addition, RNAO has developed a unique learning program - RNAO institutes - designed to enhance the knowledge and practical application skills of nurses and others in relation to implementing BPGs, across sectors and in particular areas of health care. RNAO offers in-depth learning institutes focused on BPG implementation, creating healthy work environments, wound care, chronic disease management, mental health, and primary care.

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