



## **POSITION PAPER**

# **Defining Nursing Research in the Southern Region**

### **BACKGROUND**

The Southern Nursing Research Society (SNRS) is challenged with defining the mission specific boundaries to guide the society's strategic initiatives. "Nursing" and "research" are terms which are used loosely in common language. Nursing in its more specific definition refers to a practice discipline which "is the protection, promotion, and optimization of health and abilities, prevention of illness and injury, alleviation of suffering through the diagnosis and treatment of human response, and advocacy in the care of individuals, families, communities, and populations" (American Nurses Association, 2010). Similarly, research in common vernacular is widely inclusive of a range of activities, including library searches. The scientific community views research more narrowly, as activities directly related to the development of a body of science.

Nursing research is generated by nursing professionals with various educational and experiential qualifications. The Southern Nursing Research Society (SNRS) is challenged with defining the mission-specific boundaries to guide the society's strategic initiatives. To remain relevant and strategically focused to achieve SNRS's mission, the Board desired to clarify the defining characteristics of nursing research for the southern region.

### **RESPONSES AND POLICY OPTIONS**

The SNRS Board of Directors dialogued regarding confusion expressed through program evaluations and member comments on "what constitutes" nursing research and evidence-based practice. The Board appointed a taskforce led by Dr. Cindy Munro to draft a position statement defining "what constitutes nursing research."

The taskforce conducted a review of the literature, reviewed existing position papers defining nursing research, and explored other organizations' and societies' statements regarding nursing research. The taskforce was charged with writing a position paper for adoption by the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors expects to use this position statement with the organization's mission to guide the strategic initiatives of the society.

### **THE SOCIETY'S POSITION**

Although the term "nursing research" is often used imprecisely, we believe that nursing research has a precise and discrete meaning, and that the discipline of nursing is best served by precision in the definition of what constitutes nursing research. Nursing research is the generation of new knowledge that can be generalized to promote and improve human conditions and improve health care and health care systems. Nursing research may focus on elucidating foundational underpinnings, understanding human responses, and developing effective interventions to address health and health problems and improving the quality of health care systems.

The Southern Nursing Research Society Board of Directors position is congruent with statements from the National Institute for Nursing Research (NINR) and the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) statements about the essential role of nursing research in development of

knowledge. NINR states that “nursing research develops knowledge to build the scientific foundation for clinical practice, prevent disease and disability, manage and eliminate symptoms caused by illness, and enhance end-of-life and palliative care” (NINR, 2016). AACN has differentiated the research-focused doctorate (PhD, DNS, DNSc) from the practice doctorate (DNP), and has charged PhD graduates with developing the science. AACN further defines the research-focused doctorate as “the highest level of formal education for a career in research and the scholarship of discovery” (AACN Task Force, 2010).

Nursing research encompasses many different methodologies and occurs in a variety of settings. Bench laboratory studies of molecular or cellular processes may be necessary to understand mechanisms of health problems and how interventions work. Problems of interest to nursing may need to be examined through non-human animal models or computer simulations. Clinical research and translational science are important branches of nursing research. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are used in nursing research, as different research questions require different methodologies. Research in nursing administration seeks to understand and influence systems of care delivery, and nursing education research is focused on how best to improve acquisition of disciplinary knowledge in pre-nurses and nurses. All of these seemingly disparate activities belong under the umbrella of nursing research because they are focused on building generalizable disciplinary knowledge for nursing and informing future research and practice.

There are, however, activities which do not fall under the domain of nursing research, and we believe that it is important to distinguish these from nursing research. This clear distinction is necessary to move the nursing discipline forward and advance nursing research in the southern region. This distinction is not intended to be a value judgment of activities that fall outside of the boundaries of nursing research; however, but to serve as a defining clarification and differentiation of what constitutes nursing research. Narrative literature reviews, such as topical state of the science reviews, may be helpful in making sense of published knowledge and may serve as an important precursors to research, but literature reviews are not nursing research. Concept analyses may provide a framework for research, or generate research questions, but are not considered nursing research. Systematic reviews or meta-analyses may fall within the boundaries of nursing research.

While both nursing research and evidence-based practice quality improvement projects seek solutions to nursing practice problems, we believe that it is critical to differentiate between nursing research and evidence-based practice quality improvement. Nursing research seeks to discover new knowledge that is widely applicable and generalizable. As the name indicates, evidence-based practice quality improvement projects seek solutions to local problems by applying what has already been discovered through structured methods to a local system. Evidence-based practice quality improvement projects are critical to moving scientific methods into practice settings, and vital to improving nursing practice and patient outcomes, but evidence-based practice quality improvement projects are not nursing research.

The SNRS mission focuses on supporting the conduct and dissemination of nursing research. The SNRS Board has required that all scientific sessions at the annual conference (both oral and poster presentations) report nursing research. We routinely receive queries about why literature reviews, concept analyses, and evidence-based practice projects papers are not accepted for presentation. In brief, these are important contributions to nursing practice, but they are not nursing research. We believe that there are multiple other venues for dissemination of these products. To remain consistent with our mission, the venues supported by SNRS will continue to present leading nursing research within our region.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations are provided:

1. This position statement is disseminated to the National Institute of Nursing Research, American Association of Colleges of Nursing, National League for Nursing, Council for the Advancement of Nursing Science, Midwestern Nursing Research Society, Western Nursing Research Society, and Eastern Nursing Research Society.
2. This position statement is used as a guiding framework by the Board of Directors, Research Interest Groups (RIGs), and committees to guide strategic initiatives and program planning activities.

## **REFERENCES**

AACN Task Force on the Research-focused Doctorate in Nursing. (2010). The Research-focused Doctoral Program in Nursing: Pathways to Excellence. American Association of Colleges of Nursing. Available at: <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/education-resources/PhDPosition.pdf>

American Nurses Association. (2010). Nursing's Social Policy Statement: The Essence of the Profession (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). American Nurses Association.

National Institute for Nursing Research. Frequently Asked Questions: What is Nursing Research? Available at <https://www.ninr.nih.gov/site-structure/faq#nursingresearch>