Guest Editorial: Rethinking research training.

Rahm Hallberg, Ingalill

Published in:
Journal of Advanced Nursing

DOI:
10.1046/j.1365-2648.2003.02957.x

2004

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

• Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
• You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain.
• You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

Take down policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.
Guest Editorial: Rethinking research training

In Sweden (my country), as in most European countries and virtually all around the world, it is becoming mandatory that health care should be based on scientific evidence. This raises questions about how research training in nursing should now be provided so that our future research can properly provide the more robust knowledge base that ‘evidence-based nursing’ requires.

The PhD has been the main form of research training in nursing (as in other disciplines) during the developmental phase of nursing science. In many countries, including my own, knowledge development in nursing has relied heavily on PhD theses. While doctoral studies will continue to make significant contributions to nursing knowledge, a robust evidence base for nursing cannot rely any more on doctoral studies alone. The need for an expansion of postdoctoral training and career development is long overdue. Those of us who are experienced researchers need to reflect urgently on how we can best coach our doctorally prepared nurses to become tomorrow’s leading researchers, properly equipped to tackle the formidable challenges attached to the global aspiration of ‘evidence-based health care’.

In bringing young members of our profession into research training, we now need to pay much closer attention to questions about the recruitment and funding of doctoral students; about whether the research for their theses should be part of a senior researcher’s programme or a freestanding study; about the best balance in their training programme or a freestanding study; and also of new postdoctoral researchers or on into postdoctoral positions in university departments to become principal investigators or on into postdoctoral positions in university departments to become principal investigators and, in turn, PhD supervisors.

Efficiency and effectiveness in the supervision of new doctoral students – and also of new postdoctoral researchers – are much more likely to be achieved when there is a match of research interests. In contrast, the individual research topic and the perpetuation of individual studies is counterproductive to efficient and cohesive knowledge building. If doctoral students and postdoctoral trainees connect their studies with the research programme of their supervisor, skilled and knowledgeable supervision can be provided. Furthermore, the outcome will certainly be more substantial than with isolated, small-scale work on topics that often are never followed through with further research.

Ultimately, knowledge building is an international task. We now need to consider how doctoral students are best trained to consider their own research as part of the overall global task of knowledge building in nursing. Sometimes it seems as if there is a huge divide, perhaps especially between the USA and Europe – and generally between the West and the East – in properly acknowledging the value of research already done within an area, but conducted elsewhere. Of course there are language barriers that contribute to this, but it is also attitudinal and historical. We have to make sure that today’s research students understand the notion of an international research community and that the relevance of reported research is not viewed as stopping at the border of its country of origin (unless, of course significant cultural differences dictate this). The global task of accelerating the generation of nursing knowledge for evidence-based health care compels us to take note of each other’s research, and to collaborate internationally on research, whenever there is any opportunity to do so.

In Europe, we are now actively nurturing doctoral nursing students in this outlook. The initiative taken by Professor Emeritus Rosemary Crow (UK) and the late Professor Georges Evers (University of Leuven, Belgium) to form a
European Academy of Nursing Science (EANS) has supported the development of a European Network of PhD Nursing Programmes. Some 20 universities around Europe are now members of this Network and an annual summer course is held, rotating around the member universities, for their doctoral students and supervisors. The last summer course was in Sweden and more than 50 doctoral students, representing more than 15 countries, participated in this, together with about 15–20 senior staff members. The effects in terms of broadening the students’ perspectives have been far beyond expectations. The hope is that, as postdoctoral researchers, they will exploit the links and networks already established at a formative stage to engage in productive international research collaboration, perhaps especially benefiting from the involvement of the non-English speaking countries whose research to date has not attracted so much notice. This initiative of EANS should inspire similar ventures, perhaps internationally, and its unique strength is its deliberate intent of nurturing a new – and different – generation of nurse researchers.

By the same token, and as I am doing in my own university, we also need to nurture at least some of our young researchers from the outset in the arena of multidisciplinary research. Nursing care takes place in a multidisciplinary perspective and most of the research questions approached in nursing relate in some way or another to medical, social or humanistic aspects that cannot simply be ignored. Nurses often say that medicine cannot contribute to the kind of knowledge building taking place within nursing or that only nursing research addresses the human experience of living with illness. This is of course not true. Arguably, we have more to gain from closer collaboration and multidisciplinary research than from standing apart, but we need to train nurses and doctors (and others) to engage constructively in cross-disciplinary collaboration. The Swedish Institute of Health Care Sciences (Vårdalinstitutet) where I work provides multidisciplinary research training in collaboration with the universities and more than 35 students from very differing backgrounds are currently enrolled in this programme. The doctoral students can be physicians, nurses, occupational therapists, engineers, or have a background in political science, ethnology, psychology, social work, sociology and so on. Currently nurses dominate the numbers and this bodes well in terms of nursing leading, not just joining, the multidisciplinary health care research teams of the future. I am not suggesting that this is the only way of training nurses for research in the future, but it is one way, and the one thing that I do believe is that we need now to be diversifying our approaches to research training.

To build a powerful knowledge base for nursing in this new era of demand for evidence-based health care, we need to identify and coach strong young scientists within the field of nursing. We especially need to discuss and reflect on recruitment, the timing of entering research training, the length of training and the approaches to supervision. We also need to think creatively about how best to approach multidisciplinary research questions in collaboration with other researchers and about how to encourage more international collaboration.

Ingáll Rahm Hallberg
Professor, Dean of Nursing and Head of The Swedish National Institute for Health Sciences, Lund University, PO Box 187, SE 221 00 Lund, Sweden.
E-mail: ingalill.rahm_hallberg@omv.lu.se