

Clinical Research Questions/Problems abound in Practice

1. Question the clinical reason for a procedure. Does the outcome of the procedure vary among patient groups?
2. Consider if there are discrepancies about what you know (from professional reading, trial and error, and/or your clinical experience) and what you observe in your clinical practice setting.
3. Question if a particular nursing action is as effective with one group of patients as with another.
4. Review quality improvement materials. Are there areas that need further exploring, or perhaps there are better ways to gain useful information?
5. Consider things that may decrease the cost of providing quality nursing care or devices that would enhance the ease of nurses' care for patients or benefit patient's comfort.
6. Think about better ways to deliver patient teaching and to evaluate whether the teaching is effective.

Deciding on the Problem to Study

1. Problem should have clinical significance to your practice.
 - a. Important enough to warrant the energy, time and perhaps money to complete the study.
 - b. The goal is to help find answers to clinical problems, which can lead to improved nursing practice and outcomes.
2. What is your interest in the problem?
 - a. If you are not committed to the problem under the study, the frustration and time associated with the research may lead to negative research experience and abandoning of the project.
3. Do you have access to the population you wish to study?
4. How much time will be needed to conduct the study?
5. How much will it cost?
6. Will the research require other expertise?

Stating the Study Problem (Ask yourself these questions...)

1. *What is this? What is going on here?*
 - a. Something/phenomenon is going on in the clinical setting and you want to explore it and describe it more clearly.
 - b. Often there may be little in the literature to help you clarify "*what is this*"?
 - c. This type of study is exploratory, descriptive, or naming.

Examples:

- How do wives of prostate cancer patients express their concerns about their spouses to health care workers and their spouses?
- How do patients with chronic UTI describe their discomfort?
- Are there helpful techniques to decrease children's' fears when undergoing urologic tests?

2. *What factors contribute to...?*

- a. You know something about the phenomenon but want to identify actions or elements that contribute to a certain clinical marker, patient symptom, or comfort.
- b. There is some information in the literature that may help you frame your problem. This type of study is usually exploratory.

Examples:

- What factors contribute to the trajectory of incontinence among young athletes?
- Are certain events that contribute to the breakdown of the transmission of patients' need between day and evening shift?
- What factors influence noncompliance to self-catheterization?

3. *What characteristics are associated with...? What differences exist between them?*

- a. These questions look at relationships between at least 2 groups (where the other questions focus on 1 group)
- b. These questions fall into the categories of correlational (or explanatory nonexperimental), experimental (quasi-experimental) and/or clinical trials.

Examples of correlational (or explanatory nonexperimental) study questions:

- Do women who have had vaginal births have as much incontinence as those who have C-sections?
- Is there a correlation between age and onset of stress incontinence in Hispanic women?
- Is there a relationship between certain routine exercises and chronic pelvic pain?

Examples of experimental or quasi-experimental study questions (The investigator requires that one group of patients will get some "extra" information or treatment (experimental group) and another group will not, control group):

- Will nursing consultation prior to an initial evaluation for male infertility decrease patients' anxiety?
- Do patients with fibromyalgia who have urge incontinence show similar improvement in incontinence symptoms with drug and exercise treatment as other populations with urge incontinence?
- Does information mailed to patients prior to their initial visit decrease office visit time without decreasing patient satisfaction and quality of care?

4. Write your problem statement.

- a. The purpose of the study is to _____
- b. After the word to, place an action verb such as examine, describe, determine, compare, or explore, etc.
- c. Go onto say what will be compared, explored, etc.

Excerpts from:

Colling, J.,(2003). Demystifying nursing research: Defining the problem to be studied. *Urologic Nursing*, 23:3, 225-226.