

## Evidence-Based Practice in Clinical Decision-Making

Dan Dave Duño

Clinical Instructor, Kolehiyo ng Lungsod ng Dasmariñas  
Dasmariñas, Cavite



*Dan Dave Duño is a nursing educator, entrepreneur, and healthcare professional from Cavite, Philippines. He completed his Bachelor of Science in Nursing at Our Lady of Fatima University in 2010. At present, he is a clinical instructor and professor at Kolehiyo ng Lungsod ng Dasmariñas, and co-manages a private lying-in clinic, a maternity facility dedicated to safe and compassionate maternal care. His academic interests include nursing education, case analysis, evidence-based practice, and the integration of techno-intelligent care systems in adult health nursing.*

*Beyond healthcare, Dave is a multi-field entrepreneur. He manages a garments business, a continuing branch of his mother's decades-old enterprise, maintaining its legacy while expanding its operations. He also owns a car aesthetics shop, with his customized builds earning championships and top placements in well-known car shows. Outside of work, he is passionate about big bikes and actively participates in gun sports. Dave is a bonafide member of Alpha Phi Omega, living out the fraternity's principles of Leadership, Friendship, and Service. His*

*dedication to community service, professional growth, and creative pursuits reflects his commitment to excellence across all fields he serves.*

### How to Make Clinical Decisions in Nursing

In nursing, clinical decision-making involves assessing patient needs, examining data, and selecting the best course of action for care. Clinical decision-making is the basis for nursing practice and affects patient care and outcomes. Nurses make clinical decisions many times during the day in complex situations that require immediate, effective, and appropriate decisions to prioritize interventions and safely provide nursing care to patients.

Making clinical decisions helps integrate knowledge, experience, and evidence to guide practice. The rapid changes in patient conditions, the increasing complexity of health care, and nurses' multiple responsibilities all require clinical decision-making.

EBP is a critical part of clinical decision-making for nurses. EBP uses the best available research, clinical expertise, and the patient's preferences to

make clinical decisions. Nurses can build their confidence and competence by applying EBP when making decisions informed by current scientific evidence. This background lays the groundwork for discussing the concept of EBP; therefore, it is important for nursing professionals to understand how to use EBP when making clinical decisions.

Effective EBP implementation barriers for RNs have been identified as a lack of knowledge, skills, and confidence with EBP. Although EBP is recognized as essential to providing quality patient care, many nursing professionals still lack the confidence or ability to implement EBP, despite their education. Ongoing EBP education and support should be provided to all nurses, especially to new nursing graduates who enter the workforce with varying levels of competency (Estalella et al., 2023).

### **The Concept of Evidence-Based Practice**

Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) is characterized by integrating the best available evidence with clinical expertise and patients' preferences for clinical decision-making. This definition of EBP is founded on three basic principles: (a) the provision of evidence-based guidelines requires scientific evidence to help support clinical recommendations; (b) patients should have the right to be involved in their care through shared decision-making; and (c) research has led to changes in how healthcare systems deliver services globally and locally through research-based decision-making. EBP has evolved from its initial conceptualization in the late 20th century, when research started to provide new knowledge about what works and what does not, and the growing demand for more effective and efficient healthcare changed how services are delivered from the traditional methods to more research-based approaches. In the early years of EBP, the focus was on using the best evidence and clinical expertise to develop an appropriate level of care (inferential analysis); however, EBP has changed significantly over the years, and EBP is now considered a well-defined, structured evidence-based framework with each phase having a clearly defined methodology, which allows for the evaluation of evidence and development of evidence-based recommendations.

Nurses should use clinical guidelines that summarize and interpret the most recent research evidence to provide the best possible care to their patients. By utilizing the most current research to inform clinical decisions, nurses will improve the quality of care they provide, and their workplace will foster a culture of continuous learning and adjustment to current standards of care. In addition, nurses are increasingly collaborating with other healthcare providers to implement EBP standards, facilitating successful collaboration between nurses and other healthcare professionals.

For nurses, the principles underlying EBP directly impact clinical decision-making, and understanding them is critical for all nursing professionals. With increased development in understanding how to use evidence to inform practice, nurses will be able to better support their clinical decision-making by using the latest evidence to achieve improved patient outcomes. The recognition of the role that evidence plays in clinicians' decision-making indicates that there is still a need to conduct research and evaluate nursing practice.

### **Evidence within Clinical Decision-Making**

There are different forms of clinical evidence that will assist nurses in making the appropriate decision regarding a patient's care. These forms of clinical evidence include clinical guidelines, research-based studies, expert opinion, and patient feedback. Each of these forms will have its specific use, and they will contribute differently to the overall quality of the clinical evidence available to support a decision. Evidence from systematic reviews and large-scale randomized controlled trials generally provides more reliable guidance for evidence-based decision-making than anecdotal evidence or expert opinion. Higher-quality evidence will produce better patient outcomes; thus, when nurses use high-quality evidence to inform their decisions, they will positively impact the care they provide.

It is crucial, however, for nurses to be aware of the quality differences in evidence and to be able to evaluate the validity and pertinence of the evidence they encounter. Skills in critical appraisal will help to ensure that



the evidence used to support nursing interventions is the best available evidence and enhance patient care.

Finally, the next step towards improving the quality of care for patients is integrating evidence into practice. To improve the quality of care for patients, nurses must not only understand the importance of evidence but also learn to seamlessly integrate the evidence they gather into their practice. Such practices will enable health providers to create environments where the ability to provide accurate information allows patients to make informed decisions that increase their engagement with and satisfaction with their treatment plans (Efficace et al., 2018)

Regulatory landscapes are becoming increasingly dependent upon integrating real-world evidence (RWE) to facilitate informed decision-making; consequently, organizations such as the FDA and MHRA, along with other international organizations, are proposing guidance or frameworks to allow for the use of RWE in clinical trials and regulatory submissions (Burns et al., 2023).

Integrating RWE into regulatory processes supports a changing paradigm in healthcare decision-making by bridging the gap between the availability of traditional clinical evidence and its application in real-world settings (Burns et al., 2023).

To integrate Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) into nursing, research findings must translate into routine nursing care. The integration process includes assessing credible sources of evidence; identifying and obtaining clinical guidelines and research findings; considering patients' preferences; and being aware of and applying evidence from current literature and potential new evidence sources. However, numerous obstacles prevent nurses from successfully implementing EBP in their practice, including resistance to change, time constraints, and inadequate EBP education. Addressing these obstacles is essential for EBP integration success.

A viable method for creating a culture of EBP within nursing teams is to foster teamwork through collaboration with other healthcare disciplines and to foster a supportive environment. Regular training sessions, with workshops that emphasize the importance of applying evidence to clinical decision-making, will help achieve these goals. Access to databases and journals will enable nurses to discover and apply appropriate research within their practice as well. The process of developing clinical guidelines will encourage the formation of collaborative interdisciplinary teams, allowing nurses to share knowledge and skills and provide a more holistic approach to patient care.

As nurses become more confident in their EBP skills, the next logical progression is to use clinical guidelines to support their decision-making. Clinical guidelines provide systematic recommendations based on the best quality evidence available and can be viewed as roadmaps. With an understanding of how to use clinical guidelines, nurses will enhance their practices, thereby improving patient outcomes and contributing to a more efficient healthcare system.

Clinical guidelines are methodologically developed recommendations that healthcare providers can use to make informed decisions about patient care. Clinical guidelines are created from the best available evidence, expert opinion, and clinician judgment. Typically, these guidelines are developed by a multidisciplinary team of experts who conduct literature reviews, analyze data, and develop recommendations applicable to the variety of settings in which healthcare providers practice. The methodology for developing clinical guidelines ensures that the recommendations are both evidence-based and appropriate for nurse practitioners, thereby supporting their decision-making. In practice, clinical guidelines provide the framework through which nurses use evidence to make informed decisions. Nursing clinical guidelines provide students with clear instructions for conducting nursing assessments, implementing nursing interventions, and achieving expected patient outcomes. Following the guidelines allows nurses to prioritize care using evidence-based practice. Adhering to clinical guidelines helps create continuity of care through consistent treatment, reduces the risk of errors



arising from differences in individual judgment or prior experience, and provides nurses with a means to improve patient safety.

In addition, implementing clinical guidelines in decision-making improves outcomes, as patients can rely on evidence-based clinical decisions rather than anecdotal evidence. As nurses learn to effectively use clinical guidelines throughout their training, they can successfully implement evidence-based practice in their daily work.

An understanding of how clinical guidelines are used in decision-making provides the basis for evidence-based practice, supported by real-world examples from research case studies. The case studies will demonstrate how nurses can successfully incorporate clinical guidelines into the delivery of patient care and the resulting positive impact (on patient outcomes) of doing so.

### **Evidence-Based Practice Case Studies**

Case examples are an excellent means of demonstrating how effective evidence-based practice (EBP) can be integrated into the nursing profession. An example is a hospital that implemented an evidence-based hand hygiene protocol by educating nurses on the new evidence and requiring monitoring of compliance with the guideline. As a result of the successful implementation of the hand hygiene protocol, the number of hospital-acquired infections decreased significantly. This successful implementation supports the notion that aligning nursing practice with evidence improves the quality of patient care.

A different example of implementing EBP involves a nursing team that struggled to adopt pain management techniques. The nurses' attitude toward implementing EBP was positive, but their lack of institutional support for education and training created barriers to the successful implementation of the guidelines. Throughout their journey, the nurses gained a commitment to supporting one another by providing continuing education and advocating for additional resources and training; thus, reinforcing the idea that using nursing clinical guidelines, even after

unsuccessful experiences, can strengthen nursing advocacy for the advancement of evidence-based nursing practice.

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