

Title

Systematic reviews of nursing research: development of a conceptual framework

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Thesis Index

Abstract	pg. 9
Statement of Original Work	pg. 11
Acknowledgments	pg. 12
Chapter 1. Introduction	pg. 13
Chapter 2 Background	
Evidence Based Health Care	
• introduction	pg. 19
• what is EBHC	pg. 20
• why EBHC	pg. 25
• the evidence	pg. 34
Reviews of the Research	
• introduction	pg. 44
• evolution of the literature reviews	pg. 45
• reviews as gatekeepers of knowledge	pg. 54
• summarising what we know	pg. 58
Chapter 3. Methods Used to Develop an Expanded Review Process	
Conceptual Framework	
• the different perspective of evaluations	pg. 64
• multi-dimensional concept of evidence	pg. 67
• justification of approach	pg. 68
Developing an Expanded Review Process	
• introduction	pg. 72
• method	pg. 73
Chapter 4. The Expanded Review Process	
Introduction	pg. 78
Review Protocol	
• introduction	pg. 79
• the role of the protocol	pg. 79
• proposed method for the protocol	pg. 80
Review question	
• introduction	pg. 82

• questions for interpretive research	pg. 84
• proposed method for review questions	pg. 86
Selection of Studies	
• introduction	pg. 88
• inclusion criteria	pg. 89
• exclusion criteria	pg. 91
• selection of interpretive studies	pg. 95
• selection of descriptive studies	pg. 97
• proposed method for selecting studies	pg. 97
Search Strategy	
• introduction	pg. 99
• search strategies	pg. 99
• publication bias	pg. 109
• searching for qualitative studies	pg. 110
• proposed search strategy	pg. 116
Critical Appraisal	
• introduction	pg. 118
• causes of bias and error	pg. 120
• appraisal of experimental studies	pg. 123
• appraisal of observational studies	pg. 126
• appraisal of interpretive studies	pg. 128
• appraisal of descriptive studies	pg. 134
• proposed method of appraisal	pg. 135
Hierarchy of Evidence	
• introduction	pg. 138
• current approaches	pg. 139
• ranking different types of research	pg. 143
• levels of evidence	pg. 152
• justification of this approach	pg. 154
• proposed hierarchy of evidence	pg. 155
Data Collection	
• introduction	pg. 157
• missing information and results	pg. 160
• data extraction from interpretive studies	pg. 162
• proposed method of data collection	pg. 164
Data Analysis	
• quantitative data synthesis	pg. 165

- qualitative data synthesis pg. 175
- descriptive data synthesis pg. 186
- proposed methods of synthesis pg. 187

Chapter 5.	Evaluation of the Expanded Review Framework: The Protocols	
	Introduction	pg. 193
	Overview of expanded review topic	pg. 194
	Music systematic review protocols	pg. 195
	Definitions	pg. 196
	Systematic review protocol I : effectiveness	pg. 198
	Systematic review protocol II : appropriateness	pg. 206
	Systematic review protocol III : feasibility	pg. 215
Chapter 6.	Evaluation of the Expanded Review Framework: Review Results	
	Demographics of identified studies	pg. 224
	Results of systematic review I	pg. 230
	Results of systematic review II	pg. 250
	Results of systematic review III	pg. 265
	Integration of the evidence	pg. 269
	Future research	pg. 271
Chapter 7.	Comparison Review : Physical Restraint	
	Introduction	pg. 273
	Overview of physical restraint review	pg. 274
	Physical restraint review results	
	• effectiveness	pg. 276
	• appropriateness	pg. 280
	• feasibility	pg. 282

	Summary	pg. 290
Chapter 8.	Discussion	
	The findings of the reviews	
	• integrative review	pg. 292
	• methodological critique	pg. 295
	• theoretical critique	pg. 298
	The conceptual framework	pg. 299
	The expanded review method	pg. 301
	Limitations	pg. 316
Chapter 9.	Conclusion	pg. 319
Appendix 1	Search strategy	pg. 324
Appendix 2	Critical appraisal checklists	pg. 329
Appendix 3	Data collection form	pg. 336
Appendix 4	Summary tables	
	• included RCTs - Hospital Patients	pg. 341
	• included RCTs - Procedure Patients	pg. 343
	• excluded clinical trials	pg. 345
	• interpretive and descriptive studies	pg. 349
References		pg. 352

List of Figures

1	Components of the evaluation of interventions	pg. 65
2	Conceptual framework : dimensions of the evidence	pg. 66
3	Systematic review process	pg. 73
4	Ranking of research evidence evaluating health care interventions.	pg. 144
5	Systematic review on physical restraints	pg. 275
6	Type of restraints used in acute care setting	pg. 286
7	Graphical presentation of reasons for restraining people	pg. 289

List of Graphs

1	Hospital patients: music and heart rate	pg. 231
2	Procedure patients: music and heart rate	pg. 231
3	Hospital patients: music and systolic blood pressure	pg. 232
4	Procedure patients: music and systolic blood pressure	pg. 233
5	Hospital patients: music and respiratory rate	pg. 234
6	Procedure patients: music and patients rating of pain	pg. 236
7	Sub-group analysis: intra-operative procedures - music and heart rate	pg. 240
8	Sub-group analysis: intra-operative procedures - music and systolic blood pressure	pg. 240
9	Sub-group analysis: post myocardial infarction - music and heart rate	pg. 245
10	Sub-group analysis: myocardial infarction patients - music and systolic blood pressure	pg. 246

11	Sub-group analysis: post myocardial infarction - music and respiratory rate	pg. 246
12	Hospital patients: music and anxiety	pg.252
13	Procedure patients: music and anxiety	pg. 252
14	Sensitivity analysis: all hospital patients - music and anxiety	pg. 253
15	Hospital patients: music and mood	pg. 255
16	Myocardial infarction patients: music and anxiety	pg. 260
17	Association between restraint and death	pg. 279
18	Cognitive impairment and physical restraint	pg. 289

List of Tables

1	Taxonomy of literature reviews	pg. 47
2	The indexing of the same paper in MEDLINE and CINAHL	pg. 115
3	Categorising studies risk of bias according to individual criteria	pg. 125
4	Minimising bias in observational studies	pg. 126
5	Critical appraisal of observational studies	pg. 127
6	Critical appraisal for expanded review process	pg. 136
7	Levels of evidence	pg. 141
8	Quality of evidence ratings	pg. 142
9	Scales used to measure anxiety	pg. 251
10	Restraint reduction programs in the residential care setting	pg. 277
11	Stocktake of restraint reduction programs	pg. 278
12	Patient reactions to restraint	pg. 281

13	Family reactions to restraint	pg. 282
14	Proportion of residents restrained	pg. 283
15	Duration of restraint for acute and residential care patients	pg. 284
16	Type of restraints used in acute care setting	pg. 285
17	One sub-theme from patient-oriented reasons for restraining acute care patients	pg. 288

Abstract

Background

The past two decades has seen an increasing emphasis placed on basing health care on the best available evidence. However, existing research has come under increasing scrutiny, which suggests its quality was often poor. This problem has been exacerbated by the ever increasing volume of health care literature.

To address these difficulties systematic reviews have emerged as one of the most important ways by which research is summarised and communicated to its end-users. However, as these reviews have been primarily concerned with effectiveness, they have focused almost exclusively on randomised controlled trials. As a result, systematic reviews have excluded much of the research of nurses.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to develop a process to systematically collect, appraise, summarise and synthesise the findings of a range of different types of research.

Conceptual Framework

To aid in the development of these expanded review methods, a conceptual framework was developed that addressed effectiveness, appropriateness and feasibility.

Method

A search of the literature was undertaken to identify published reviews of different types of research, and discussions in the health care literature related to the conduct of research reviews. These reviews and discussion papers served as the basis for developing the expanded review methods.

Evaluation

To evaluate the expanded review methods, two systematic reviews were conducted. The protocol and results of the first review on the use of music in hospitals are presented to demonstrate how the conceptual framework and expanded review methods enabled a broader evaluation of the topic. Selected results from the second review on the use of physical restraint are presented to demonstrate how the findings from a number of methodologically different types of research were incorporated into a systematic review.

Conclusion

The conduct of the two systematic reviews clearly demonstrated that the proposed expanded review process was able to rigorously collect and summarise a range of different types of research. Additionally, the conceptual framework underpinning these reviews enabled each of the studies to be located logically and coherently during the synthesis of data

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