



Knowledge translation and the power of the nursing academic conference



1. Introduction

It could be argued, that the need for empirical nursing research has never been greater. In the UK, the nursing workforce faces a myriad of challenges. Occupational factors aligned to poor skill mix, falling registered nurse numbers, safety concerns and lack of staffing are resulting in unprecedented levels of stress.¹ In 2017, the number of nurses leaving the profession was greater than those joining,² and UK nurses are more at risk of suicide than any other health professional, with women health workers being 23% more likely to kill themselves than any other females.³ There have been new initiatives with the introduction of an apprenticeship route into nursing, new roles in the form of a more qualified support worker (the nursing associate), and new Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) standards for the preparation of nurses and midwives. Against this backdrop, the UK Government has removed the nursing bursary, which financially supported nurses through their undergraduate education in English Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The decision was made despite a palpable lack of engagement, market testing or a firm analysis of the likely impact. Therefore, the need for reliable, robust and valid innovative nursing research that indicates the impact of these changes and informs knowledge translation to improve evidence based practice is implicit. But where is it?

The Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) (England) through the Leading Change, Adding Value framework has highlighted the need to measure the outputs from all nursing, midwifery and care staff.⁴ A particular focus is the development of a research portfolio with the emphasis on tackling “unwarranted variation.” To achieve this, the CNO (England) is collaborating with the UK Council of Deans for Health and Higher Education Institutions to identify the key priorities for research and showcase some of the best studies. The inclusion criteria span the nursing academic lifetime, from undergraduate to post-doctoral studies and commissioned projects. This requires research capacity, capability

and leadership; unfortunately nursing has been generally less resourced than research led by other professional or academic bodies. In the UK this includes studies commissioned by the National Institute for Health Research, which predominately funds research led by medical professionals.

There is a requirement to cast a wider net to capture international nursing research. Fortunately, publications such as *Nurse Education Today* provide an ideal medium to offer a peer reviewed commentary on factors that can either improve nursing education/practice or highlight likely concerns. However, translating the outputs from academic/higher degrees may take several years from commencement to completion and then peer review publication. For many excellent doctoral nursing studies, it may be several years before the initial ideas result in the finished project, due in part to the favoured part-time nature of study. Therefore, nursing requires a dynamic platform to communicate the findings from developing projects and an ideal medium is high quality conferences.

2. Conferences

The national and international conference experiences present a unique learning opportunity. There are differing events that reflect the full nursing employment spectrum from clinical delivery, organizational and policy development and academia in education and research. Many conferences provide a platform for academics with differing levels of experience to come together and welcome contributions from students and all grades of post-registration nurses, educationalists, administrators, and researchers. In selecting the programme, the conference organisers will often circulate a calling notice and potential presenters will submit their abstracts to be blind peer reviewed. Therefore, conferences showcase the best of the best and provide the current perspective of areas of growth within the nursing sector. Conferences have a plethora of delivery routes ranging from posters,

¹ RCN (2018) Safe and Effective Staffing: Nursing Against the Odds. At: <https://www.rcn.org.uk/-/media/royal-college-of-nursing/.../2017/.../pdf-006415.pdf>. Accessed 20 July 2018.

² NMC (2017) The NMC Register 30 September 2017 <https://www.nmc.org.uk/globalassets/sitedocuments/other-publications/the-nmc-register-30-september-2017.pdf>.

³ ONS (2018) Suicide by Occupation. 2011 to 2015. At: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/suicidebyoccupation/england2011to2015>. Accessed 20 July 2018.

⁴ NHS England (2017) Leading Change, Adding Value At: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/nursing-framework.pdf>. Accessed 20 July 2018.

oral presentations (both short and long), panel discussions, key notes, seminars, exhibitions and workshops. These present an exceptional chance to listen, present, network and discuss nursing innovation and academic research.

Conference programmes may be accessible via a mobile application, which makes it easy for attendees to view the content and define their personal schedule. These include often hidden gems in the poster sections. Attendees have the chance to hear about cutting edge developments in areas such as technology and simulation, and studies that centre on the importance of nursing characteristics. There are openings to learn from colleagues involved in similar disciplines/interests and discover why they choose their tests, methodology and theoretical approach. Participants can identify details from comparable studies where the findings are often being presented for the first time or before publication. In many ways, this can stop researchers re-inventing the wheel and spending time replicating a study which has already been completed. Or assist in finding a new angle to exploit recent research and take it to the next level. It can help ensure that, as a study nears completion, the author is cognisant of emerging research.

There are numerous advantages in contributing and making other attendees aware of your work. Conferences provide a medium to display the academic and research results much earlier. These events importantly provide emerging and novice researchers with the opportunity to present the findings from MSc and PhD studies before they are completed or have been submitted to journals. Even a recently commenced study can reap rewards from constructive feedback and questioning. Reporting the initial results can help immerse the presenter into the data and look at alternative analyses that might help improve the findings. The layout of the presentation often mirrors publication requirements and can help develop a logical and succinct means of displaying the study. Those attending may be there with a specific interest in your subject, and be prepared to share details of their work, and then sustain contact after the conference. Additional networking opportunities are also available, including social events where attendees can meet international colleagues and meet the editorial team.

3. NETNEP & RCN Conferences

Two of the world's major nursing international conferences were held in April/May 2018 and showcased an extraordinary amount of high class nursing academia initiatives and research. Within the UK, the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) International research conference and exhibition continued to highlight emerging nursing research.⁵ In Canada, the Nurse Education Today/Nurse Education in Practice (NETNEP) 7th International Conference was held in Banff Canada. NETNEP is held every 2 years in a different continent, with the last three being held in Canada, Australia and Europe (Holland). The NETNEP series of conferences are designed to facilitate the sharing and translation of global knowledge and experience of nursing, midwifery and healthcare. The 2018 NETNEP conference maintained this philosophy by sharing of research, practice and healthcare education as it impacts on the learning experience of students and qualified practitioners and the health and social care needs, and safety, of the individuals and global communities it serves.

These conferences were managed along specific themes and provide the focus for nurses in those specialties to attend the session with the most relevance and ensuring value for money. The seven themes for 2018 were: a. teaching & assessment; b. learning in practice – clinical

⁵ RCN (2018). Research Conference. 16–18 April 2018. Posters and Presentations at: https://www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/research-and-innovation/research-events/rcn-2018-research-conference?utm_campaign=455231_Research%20and%20Innovation%20Bulletin%20-%20Vol%209%20Issue%2011&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Royal%20College%20of%20Nursing&dm_i=4JL6,9R9B,2XG79H,12E6F,1. Accessed 20 July 2018.

Table 1
Origin of presenters at NETNEP 2018.

Ser	Country
1	Australia
2	Brazil
3	Canada
4	Chile
5	Denmark
6	Finland
7	Holland
8	Hong Kong
9	Iran
10	Ireland
11	Israel
12	New Zealand
13	Japan
14	Nigeria
15	Norway
16	South Korea
17	Sweden
18	Switzerland
19	Taiwan
20	Thailand
21	West Indies
22	UK
23	USA

education; c. new technologies, simulation and social media in teaching and practice; d. curriculum innovation and development; e. evidence and educational discourse; f. research, scholarship and evaluation and g. professional development and leadership.

The planning and organisation for NETNEP commenced 18 months ahead of the event in a truly an international affair. The calling notice was answered with nearly 950 submissions resulting in presentations from 23 countries⁶ (see Table 1) provided to over 500 attendees. Throughout the three-day event, there were 237 presentations (6 keynotes; 157 oral presentations; 43 oral and poster; and 31 Rapid 5's) and additional workshops providing direction on: writing for publication, circumnavigate the publishing process; dealing with editorial comments, ethical considerations and maximising the outputs. The Rapid 5 sessions were introduced for the first time with presenters restricted to a maximum of three PowerPoint slides in 5 min, therefore requiring focus, clarify, and succinctness. The Rapid 5 presentations from nurses whose native language was not English were outstanding.

4. Conclusion

With such a positive opportunity offered by conferences there remains the salutary warning of avoiding rogue events, which accept any paper irrespective of the quality. The intent of these events is to make money. Therefore, nursing academics can be trapped by events that carry the façade of a high standard nursing event but are predatory in nature. Whilst any conference organiser does not intend to lose money; the primary intent is not capitalist and profit making, and definitely not to be exploitive.

That aside, quality conferences provide an opportunity to represent your country, discipline or showcase international collaborations. A certain pride can be extracted from this knowledge, and demonstrating how your nursing academia endeavors can influence teaching, research, policy and clinical practice. International placements can be established and knowledge of grant and fellowship opportunities obtained. It is also a good medium for journal editors to listen to emerging topics and recruit articles for their journals.

⁶ NETNEP (2018) Nurse Educational Today 7th International Conference. 6–9May 2018. Available at: <https://www.elsevier.com/events/conferences/international-nurse-education-conference>. Accessed 20 July 2018.

Whatever stage the nurse is in their career, being selected following peer review builds an academic profile and reputation. This development over a time is a useful addition to a CV and informs your current managers and potentially future employers of the calibre of your work. In academic conferences, friends and acquaintances made in these sessions can be held for life and may be there as your careers develop. They can be useful sources as future employees, employers or people to be external examiners or viva assessors. It can also be a great opportunity to meet up with former friends and colleagues. The conference retains its power and credibility even in these most testing of times.

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