

Considering the Problem

Susan J. Fetzer, PhD, RN

THE FIRST AND MOST important step in a clinical project, quality improvement initiative or research study is the identification of the problem, a problem requiring a solution. By clearly defining a problem, the researcher creates a direction for the research study. Later, the purpose of the study will also align with the problem, as the researcher attempts to solve the problem with research. Finally, the problem directs the methodology of the study so that a possible resolution to the problem can be tested. By understanding the problem which deserves a solution, the reader determines if further reading of the study will be of importance to clinical practice.

A description of the problem or the problem statement should be located in the introductory paragraph of the research article. When the problem is important and researchable, the reader is more likely to continue reading the manuscript. Sources are used to justify the problem and place the problem within the scope of nursing practice or a nursing theory. The sources must support the importance or significance of the problem. The statement should be researchable and not pose an ethical or political issue. In this issue of *JoPAN*, Brix et al¹ report the findings of a randomized controlled trial using text messaging as reminder prompts for postoperative arthroscopy patients to medicate for pain. The problem statement is clearly located in the third sentence of the manuscript “Unfortunately, the self-administered pain treatment after outpatient surgery is often inadequate, and many outpatients experience moderate to severe pain after discharge.” The problem is significant, researchable, and important to perianesthesia nurses and patients.

When generating a researchable problem, the researcher asks questions to determine the gap in nursing knowledge. Questions may include: Is one intervention better than another? What is of concern in this situation? How can the situation be described? Sources of research problems include observing clinical practice, reading the literature, discussing clinical problems with colleagues, and interacting with students. Funding agencies and specialty groups, such as American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses, also identify research priorities.

When evaluating a research problem statement, the reader looks for focus on real-world concerns, a focus on knowledge or theory building, and problems that are current or timely. In this issue, Baumgarten et al² pose a critical concern and identify the problem that “despite clinical guidelines on how to provide IV fluid in the perioperative period, practices of health professionals vary.” Although the problem of evidence-based practice implementation is timely, the research problem occurs in the third paragraph of the manuscript which could detract the reader from further appraisal of the study.

Research problems vary with time and practice. Often, a researcher identifies a problem based on personal or professional experience. However, there should be a compelling rationale for selecting the topic of the study. Binay et al³ report in this issue of the journal a study comparing two methods to decreased intravenous insertion pain in children. Although pain during intravenous insertions could be a problem, the authors note that there are many nonpharmacologic interventions available. Unfortunately, the authors overlook the need to provide a compelling reason to conduct further study on the topic. The reader is not made aware of the gap in knowledge on the topic.

Once a research problem is identified, the researcher will briefly summarize literature to assist in clarifying, narrowing, and refining the problem. Literature supporting the problem differs from background or a literature review. Problem-

Susan J. Fetzer, PhD, RN, Department of Nursing, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH.

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Address correspondence to Susan J. Fetzer, 59 Stonebenge Drive, Henniker, NH 03242; e-mail address: sfetzer@unb.edu.

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supporting literature often includes epidemiologic or demographic data supporting the extent of the problem.

The research problem or knowledge gap determines the complexity of the research study and lays the groundwork for understanding the re-

sults of a study. A clear research problem entices the reader to continue learning about the potential solution the researcher is investigating. By clearly articulating the importance of the research problem, the reader's confidence in the ability of the researcher to solve the problem is validated.

References

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intravenous fluid therapy—a prospective, descriptive, single-center cohort study. *J PeriAnesthesia Nurs.* 2019;34:717-728.

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Calendar of Events

October 5, 2019. The Pennsylvania Association of PeriAnesthesia Nurses (PAPAN) invites you join them for the annual PRIDE Conference in King of Prussia, PA, at the Crowne Plaza, 260 Mall Boulevard. Save the Date for Saturday, October 5th, 7:30 am to 5:00 pm and Sunday, October 6th, from 7:30 am to 12:45 pm! Topics include Medical Marijuana (featuring a nationally recognized speaker), Ethical Dilemmas in the PACU, Postop Urinary Retention, and many more. The Saturday evening fun event is Painting With A Twist. For more information contact the Nurse Planner, Susan Erwine, RN, BSN at serwine@verizon.net.

October 19, 2019. The Illinois Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses (ILSPAN) invites you to join them for the 2019 ILSPAN Fall Conference in Peoria, IL at the Parliament room, at Methodist College of UnityPoint Health, 7600 N Academic Dr, Peoria, IL 61615. The conference objective is to discuss clinical priorities for the perianesthesia nurse. More information is coming soon. For more conference information contact Liz White, BSN, RN, CAPA at elizabeth.white@unitypoint.org or 309-208-6932.