Nursing Matters fact sheets provide quick reference information and international perspectives from the nursing profession on current health and social issues.

Nursing research: a tool for action

What is nursing research?
The quest for quality and cost-effective health care has brought evidence based practice and nursing research into the forefront. Nursing research is a systematic enquiry that seeks to add new nursing knowledge to benefit patients, families and communities. It encompasses all aspects of health that are of interest to nursing, including promotion of health, prevention of illness, care of people of all ages during illness and recovery or towards a peaceful and dignified death. Nursing research applies the scientific approach in an effort to gain knowledge, answer questions, or solve problems.

The knowledge generated through nursing research is used to develop evidence-based practice, improve the quality of care and to maximise health outcomes and cost-effectiveness of nursing interventions.

Why nursing research?
Research-based practice is a hallmark of professional nursing. Nursing research, both qualitative and quantitative, is critical for quality, cost-effective health care. Nursing research is needed to generate new knowledge, evaluate existing practice and services, and provide evidence that will inform nursing education, practice, research and management. Nursing research is a powerful means of answering questions about health care interventions and finding better ways of promoting health, prevention of illness and providing care and rehabilitation services to people of all ages and in different settings.

The main goal of nursing research is to improve care outcomes by advancing nursing knowledge and practice and to inform health policy. To this end, ICN facilitates and promotes the conduct, dissemination and utilisation of research related to nursing, health and health care systems.

Priority for nursing research
ICN has identified nursing research priorities in two broad areas that address the phenomena of interest to nursing. These are Health and Illness and Delivery of Care Services.

Health and Illness. Nursing research in health and illness focuses on a number of areas including health promotion, prevention of illness, control of symptoms, living with chronic conditions and enhancing quality of life; caring
for clients experiencing changes in their health and illness; assessing and monitoring client problems; providing and testing nursing care interventions and measuring the outcomes of care.

The recommended nursing research priorities relating to Health and Illness are include issues such as HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, chronic illness, infection control, women's health and mental health.

**Delivery of Care Services.** Nursing research priorities in Delivery of Care Services focus on quality and cost effectiveness of care, community based care, nursing workforce and health care reform. Areas for nursing research include impact of nursing interventions on client outcomes, evidence-based nursing practice, primary health care, home care, quality of nurses' work life, retention, satisfaction with work, impact of reform on health policy, program planning and evaluation, impact upon equity and access to nursing care and its effects on nursing, and the financing of health care.

**Strategies for nursing research**

Strategies in nursing research need to support nursing research internationally and build and sustain the knowledge base for nursing practice. ICN strategies are designed to enhance the capacity for nursing research at an international level and aim to:

- Support and encourage national nurses Associations (NNAs) in capacity building related to nursing research such as by developing a research agenda and priorities, research support and advice, research-related databases, research education, research dissemination and utilization, and promoting cooperation in nursing research.
- Continue to work with WHO, NGOs and others to ensure that the international nursing research agenda is visible and included in priority statements; lobby for nurse researchers to be on appropriate research boards, and health-related international research bodies.
- Establish and support a network of nurse researchers who will have the capability to pursue the recommended international nursing research agenda on Health and Illness and the Delivery of Care Services
- Develop and promote the utilization of the Internet as a strategy to enhance international communication among nurse researchers, increase access to documents, and provide access to an international pool of expert nurse researchers.
- Promote opportunities for nurse researcher to publish in international journals such as the International Nursing Review; encourage editors to include international membership; assist authors whose first language may not be English; and encourage journals to include an English abstract if the journal is published in another language.
In the era of evidence based practice and knowledge-driven health care, nurses are constantly challenged to discover new and better ways of delivering care that is grounded in new knowledge and evidence derived through research. Nurses have a professional obligation to society to provide care that is constantly reviewed, researched and validated.

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The International Council of Nurses (ICN) is a federation of more than 130 national nurses associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses and leading nursing internationally, ICN works to ensure quality nursing care for all and sound health policies globally.

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References

2 International Council of Nurses (1999), ICN Position Statement on Nursing Research.

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