Delphi Survey of Nursing Research Priorities

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Purpose/Objectives: To identify oncology nurses' priorities for topics and issues to be addressed by developing a clinical nursing research program at a large comprehensive cancer center.

Design: Delphi survey, completed in two rounds.

Setting: A large comprehensive cancer center in the southern United States.

Sample: All 1,500 RNs employed at the cancer center. Round I asked nurses to identify topics they believed needed to be studied, and 642 nurses responded. In round II, 567 nurses ranked these priorities.

Methods: Surveys were distributed to all nurses who work in a variety of settings at the cancer center. Open-ended responses from round I were content analyzed, round II rankings of importance were described, and factor analysis was performed.

Main Research Variables: 120 topics were identified from a content analysis of research areas described by nurses in the cancer center.

Findings: 120 research priorities were identified. Factor analysis revealed three factors: clinical care, nurses and skills, and administrative aspects.

Conclusions: The top five research priorities identified at the cancer center were, in rank order, acute and chronic pain, infection rates and control, job satisfaction, nurse-patient ratios and staffing, and nurse retention. This study's survey included items similar to those on the recently conducted Oncology Nursing Society research priority survey. Pain and issues with infection were among the top five priorities in both surveys.

Implications for Nursing: Conducting a survey to identify nurses' perceptions of research was useful in involving nurses in the conduct of research, and the results were useful guides to beginning a coordinated program of nursing research.

Key Points . . .

➤ Conducting an institutional Delphi survey is a useful way to involve nurses in research and guide future studies.

➤ The top five cancer center priorities were, in rank order, acute and chronic pain, infection rates and control, job satisfaction, nurse-patient ratios and staffing, and nurse retention.

T he development of a clinical nursing research program requires coordinated studies to build the scientific knowledge base for nursing practice. Although a great deal has been written by nurses in academic settings about the need for programs of research, literature about the conduct and use of research in clinical settings is more recent. Defining research priorities is an essential initial step in establishing a coordinated base for nursing research. The mission statement of a large comprehensive cancer center in the southern United States includes this phrase: "to eliminate cancer and allied diseases . . . by developing and maintaining integrated quality programs in patient care, research, education, and prevention." The director of applied nursing research, with the Nursing Research Council, established the need to assess the research priorities in oncology nursing to provide a basis for clinical practice, education, and research and to demonstrate support of the institution's mission.

The use of the Delphi survey in establishing priorities is well documented in the literature. It elicits judgments from experts for the purpose of short-term forecasting and planning (Shortridge et al., 1989). Named for the Greek oracle at Delphi, from whom the Greeks sought advice about the future, the Delphi technique first was used by Olaf Helmer and Norman Dalkey in 1953 at the RAND Corporation to obtain a consensus of experts when addressing military planning. The technique became popular when it was used a decade later for large-scale technologic forecasting and corporate planning (Helmer, 1983). Delphi surveys now are used to identify and prioritize a range of views on a variety of topics in a number of disciplines. For example, Atwal and Caldwell (2003) used a Delphi study of occupational therapists to reach consensus about discharge planning. McBride, Pates, Ramadan, and McGowan (2003) also used a Delphi survey to elicit strategies used by community pharmacists to reduce over-the-counter drug misuse. Other Delphi surveys were conducted by Schopper, Ammon, Ronchi, and Rougmont (2000) and Schneider and Dutton (2002).

Studies using the Delphi method to establish nursing research priorities have been completed in a variety of settings in Hong Kong (French, Ho, & Lee, 2002) and several countries, including Australia (Barrett, Kristjanson, Sinclair, &