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“How Do You Know That?”

Having recently returned from the Oncology Nursing Society Annual Congress and the American Society of Clinical Oncology Annual Meeting, my head is spinning with new information and ideas. I came home with voluminous amounts of literature. Add that to the ever-expanding piles of journals that I receive—*Nursing Research*, *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, *New England Journal of Medicine*, *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, and *Biological Research in Nursing*, among others—and you can understand why I worry about the floor collapsing. Is there a feasible way of keeping up with all of the scientific advances that we need to practice?

We talk a lot about evidence-based practice in nursing and medicine. When a recommendation is made to a patient for a clinical treatment or nursing intervention and he or she asks, “How do you know that?” what is our response? If that recommendation is not based on hard data—rigorous research and multiple studies—we are kidding ourselves into thinking that we practice in an evidence-based manner. Unfortunately, much of our day-to-day practice is not based on research but rather anecdotal clinical experience and tradition. We have a long way to go.

However, with every passing day, knowledge is being generated and published, and we have a professional obligation to our pa-

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tients to keep abreast. This brings us back to the original problem: How do we keep up with important developments? Some strategies that have worked for me over the years have been spending an afternoon a month in my hospital library, perusing the tables of content in journals to which I do not subscribe, using online newsletters that highlight key studies according to specialty, and developing a collegial relationship with a medical librarian.

I love librarians! I have never met an unpleasant or unhelpful one. Unfortunately, now that many nurses believe that Google™ is the epitome in conducting a literature search, many librarians are lonely indeed. Much is to be learned from your hospital librarian, and he or she can help you keep abreast of the science in your specialty area. With the constant development of new Web sites and Internet resources, keeping current is difficult without your librarian's help. New specialized search engines, multime-

dia sources for photos, audio and video clips, online writing labs, and general reference sites are a few possibilities.

In terms of the ever-growing piles of journals beside the couch, try to develop a system. Some journals I keep intact. For those that offer full online access with a subscription, I only file those articles directly related to my specialty area, debriding the files annually for outdated information. One of the most effective strategies for me has been to summarize important information pertinent to my practice and download to my personal digital assistant (PDA). So much information is now in my PDA that it has become more valuable than a stethoscope! I was not too enthused about using a PDA initially until a physician I was working with, Ronald Blum, MD, now at Beth Israel Medical Center in New York, NY, convinced me (kicking and screaming) of its utility. Now, I cannot imagine working without it.

Whatever strategies each of us develops, as professionals, we have an obligation to provide a scientific answer when our patients ask, “How do you know that?” An assured recitation of the latest rigorous studies demonstrating the efficacy of a particular intervention is what our patients deserve.

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