FACTORS PROMOTING ACADEMIC DISSEMINATION AMONG NURSES

ABSTRACT

This study looked at the publishing rates of academic work among 214 community nurses in three primary care trusts. Just under a third had disseminated their work, while 64% had not shared their work. Only 3% of the sample had their work published, other methods of dissemination were used more frequently. The study identified factors that appear to increase the likelihood of disseminating work. The second part of the study, to be published next week in NT, identifies the barriers. This is a summary: the full article and reference list can be accessed at nursingtimes.net.

The aim of the study was to establish the proportion of nurses who disseminate the results of their academic work, the factors that influence this and what might be done to improve the sharing of knowledge.

METHOD
This descriptive and retrospective study asked nurses to look back over six years since clinical governance was introduced and to describe what they had done relating to writing and disseminating coursework. Community nurses across three primary care trusts (PCTs) in England were approached. A postal questionnaire with structured questions was used.

RESULTS
A total of 378 questionnaires were posted in the first instance with a response rate of 214 (62%). The greatest proportion of those who replied (79%) were between 41 and 60 years of age, 58% had been qualified for more than 21 years. Practice nurses and health visitors made up the largest groups, 31% and 23% respectively. The majority had post-basic qualifications.

The nurses were asked whether they had produced any academic coursework in the past six years. If the answer was ‘yes’, they were then asked how many pieces of coursework they had produced. Of the group, 83% had produced academic coursework in the six years before the study. More than a third of these (42%) had produced five or more pieces of work and almost a fifth (19%) three to four.

The nurses were asked what grade or mark they had received for their most time-consuming piece of work – 68% had received grades above 60%, which suggests high standards of coursework.

The study looked at dissemination activities including methods other than publishing. These included presentation at a team meeting, at a conference, at a seminar or dissemination via the internet. Of the nurses, 32% had disseminated their work, mainly by presenting in a team meeting, with 64% not having disseminated any information.

Other studies have examined publication rates. Only 3% of this group had published their work, this is lower than other studies, which range from 7–9%. This may be due to the fact that the population being studied were not nurse academics but practising nurses. The most popular form of dissemination was to present at a team meeting – 28% of the total sample did this, 59% of those who had disseminated.

School nurses were the most likely to disseminate their work, followed by district nurses and then practice nurses.

Qualifications made a significant difference to the dissemination of coursework. Those holding a specialist practitioner qualification were highly likely to disseminate their work, as were those with a teaching qualification, those with an RSCN qualification, those with a first degree and a higher degree.

The numbers of pieces of work also made a significant difference to the levels of dissemination, with those who had produced more work being more likely to disseminate. This dropped proportionately, with the nurses producing the least coursework being less likely to disseminate. The mark received had an impact on dissemination levels. In this sample, community nurses with the highest marks were more likely to disseminate than those with the lowest mark.

DISCUSSION
The overall response rate from eligible subjects in this study was 62% (n = 214). The overall response rates across the PCTs were similar and this makes it easier to draw generalisations from the study.

The mean age group of the sample was in the 41–50 category and, unlike the study by Hicks (1995), there were no statistically

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE
- Publishing rates for nurses continue to be low despite the finding that the majority of respondents in this study had produced academic coursework in the past six years.
- Publishing was the least used method for dissemination of academic work. Presenting at a team meeting was the most popular method.
- Attending funded courses does not appear to increase academic dissemination rates.
- Nurses need to be encouraged to disseminate their work through a variety of means. Training may help to facilitate this.
- Nurses who produce a greater number of pieces of coursework, achieve higher marks, and have more post-basic qualifications are more likely to disseminate work.
significant differences in dissemination relating to age. The length of time qualified and the number of years working in the community made no significant difference to dissemination activity.

The rate of dissemination for study respondents was 32%, with the overall dissemination activity at 48%, as some of the sample had disseminated their coursework in more than one way. As other studies have not examined dissemination of coursework it is difficult to compare these findings but the likelihood is that nurses who do research may be more highly motivated than the average nurse and that dissemination by other nurses might be lower than researchers.

Other studies have considered publishing rates in relation to nursing research and the findings have been about 7% (McVeigh, 2002), whereas in this study the publishing rates were just 3%. Publishing rates of research are likely to be higher than those for academic coursework due to the nature of the work. It is disappointing, however, that in spite of improvements in nurse education and the emphasis on lifelong learning and evidence-based practice, publishing rates are still as low as those reported in this study.

It is interesting to note that dissemination activities are much higher than this when other forums are used. The most popular forum was team meetings, with 28% of community nurses choosing to disseminate in this way. One could argue that this form of dissemination is unlikely to change or challenge nursing practice. However, if this sample were representative of the whole of the community nursing population, and such strategies were taking place across the country, there would be a significant impact on practice as a result. One could not be complacent even if this were the case as there were still 64% of respondents who were not disseminating their coursework at all.

Different types of nurses
Occupational groups produced significant differences in research activities, with school nurses being more likely to disseminate than the other groups, followed by qualified district nurses and then practice nurses.

In this study, health visitors and community staff nurses were the least likely professionals to disseminate academic coursework. The reasons that health visitors may be less likely to disseminate might be that they have traditionally worked alone on a caseload rather than in teams, although this is now changing with the introduction of skill-mix into health visiting practice. Community staff nurses may feel less able to disseminate coursework or less likely to have encouragement from senior colleagues.

Qualifications
Post-basic qualifications do significantly impact on dissemination activities. Those with a specialist practitioner qualification and those with teaching qualifications were the most likely to disseminate their work. In addition, those with an RSCN qualification, a first degree or a higher degree were also more likely to disseminate.

Volume of work
Dissemination rates rose in proportion to the number of pieces of work produced. This is perhaps not surprising as the more study carried out the more likely it might be for nurses’ confidence to grow and for quality to improve, promoting further dissemination. The same results were suggested in relation to marks for work. The higher the mark the more likely nurses were to disseminate. Again this is likely to relate to confidence.

Some 80% of the sample who had produced a research project had disseminated their findings, and 64% of those had produced dissertations compared with 32% who had written an essay/assignment. Perhaps this factor needs further consideration by universities when deciding on forms of course assessment.

Impact on practice
As suggested by this study, respondents who felt that the coursework had influenced their practice were more likely to disseminate than those who did not. This would make sense as nurses are likely to want to improve practice.

Surprisingly, relevance to practice did not seem to make a difference to dissemination rates; neither did funding from employer or undertaking a literature review. Policymakers may also consider these factors, as funding courses does not appear to be sufficient incentive for nurses to disseminate their findings. Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, nurses who undertake a number of courses and receive higher marks are more likely to disseminate their findings.

Limitations of the study
The low response rates from some occupations across the PCTs mean that findings relating to these should be read with caution. The overall response rate for a postal survey was good and makes the results more meaningful. Due to the use of a whole population sample this improves the ability of the findings to be representative across the country but the response rate and the relatively small sample weakens the case for this. Postal questionnaires are renowned for producing poor response rates and this study only just reached above 60%.

CONCLUSION
The findings suggest that in spite of nurse education being at its highest level ever (Wheeler et al, 2000), nurses still have difficulty sharing what they know. The majority of respondents surveyed produced academic coursework in the past six years. Only a third had disseminated this work and, on the whole, the dissemination was in local team meetings that may have involved small numbers. The study highlights the need for nurses to be encouraged to disseminate through a variety of means and to receive training in order to help facilitate this.

REFERENCES
