

## Critiquing Nursing Research

**Note**

Health care practice and knowledge are constantly changing and developing as new research and treatments, changes in procedures, drugs and equipment become available.

The author and publishers have, as far as is possible, taken care to confirm that the information complies with the latest standards of practice and legislation.

# **Critiquing Nursing Research**

*2nd edition*

John Cutcliffe and Martin Ward



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## Foreword to the first edition

The Royal College of Nursing Institute is proud to have been associated with the establishment of the Network for Psychiatric Nursing Research (NPNR) in the mid-1990s. As host for this Department of Health (England) funded innovation, the spirit and commitment shown by the originators of the idea, were very much in synchrony with the aspirations and vision of the Institute.

The authors of this book have provided us with a detailed outline of how the network developed, what it was trying to achieve and how it has refined its purposes. Responding to the policy imperative of the evidence-based practice movement, the founders of NPNR have been able to combine the essential ingredients of effective utilisation of evidence into practice; namely, the ability to critique research with a practitioner/researcher network of interested, committed individuals. This combination of critical appraisal skill development (covering both conventional quantitative and qualitative approaches) with dissemination and networking strategies is still quite a rare phenomenon. And the efforts of all those volunteers, who have contributed their intellectual and clinical expertise by way of being involved in critiquing research, or attending NPNR conferences, should also be acknowledged.

But the last words rightly rest with the authors themselves on the future direction of this timely and important initiative. Acknowledging the changing policy and practice landscape, the evolution of a much more integrated, inter-professional, person-centred research agenda and the impact of technology on research dissemination and implementation methods, Cutcliffe and Ward comment:

... Our future success lies in combining all the evidence resources at our disposal, including research, with the spontaneity of our intuitive actions and subjecting both to the same level of critical evaluation. In short, raising the level of our professional thinking to a more mature status.

This book offers one perspective on this journey.

*Alison Kitson RN, PhD, FRCN  
Executive Director, Nursing  
Royal College of Nursing  
April 2003*



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## Foreword to the second edition

Apart from the genuine sense of honour that I experienced when I was asked to write the foreword for this book, I also felt that the invitation was timely for another reason. As I write this foreword, I am in the process of retiring from my post at the Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London, where I have held a Chair of Psychiatric Nursing since 1995. Such an occasion obviously prompts one to look back over one's career and to consider the way in which knowledge has evolved. As I read the manuscript for this book, I observed that John Cutcliffe and Martin Ward were, in their own way, engaged in a very similar process. That there is now a second edition of this book testifies to the way that our thinking about nursing research has evolved. For my part, I mistakenly thought at the time that I completed my PhD in the early 1980s that the then embryonic movement towards evidence-based medicine in psychiatry would have very clear-cut and positive results for nursing research. As it transpired, the evidence-based approach has brought major benefits – not only to research, but also to patient care. However, at the same time our understanding of what constitutes evidence is, in some senses, less clear now than it was a decade ago. We have come to realise that, although the randomised controlled trial is the gold standard for evaluating the outcomes of treatment, in mental health care the majority of studies published in journals are, from a statistical point of view, grossly under-powered, and many of the measures that we use are riddled with imperfections. If we set these problems alongside the way that we have now developed more robust methods in qualitative research, and the need to justify everything in terms of cost, we have a research scenario that defies simple description. We also need to note that, in mental health care particularly, while evidence, efficacy and effectiveness now constitute imperatives for all services delivering care and treatment, implementation of our knowledge is another matter. We now know that mental health care is beset by a range of problems in implementation, including fidelity to model, the lack of training capacity, and, once more, the issue of cost.

The rationale for the first edition of this book was based on the increasing need for nurses not only to become conversant with research, but also to consider evidence with a critical eye. This rationale is even more pertinent today than at the time of writing the first edition. The book provides nurses, in both the research and clinical fields, with a considerable resource in terms of understanding and critiquing, and this – of course – should have beneficial consequences

*Foreword to the second edition*

for patient care. John Cutcliffe and Martin Ward have added to the first edition, which at the time was both comprehensive and authoritative, new material that will be of tremendous assistance to research students in their 'writing up', and have also put their original work into the European and broader global context.

I have no doubt that this is a book that will reach researchers at all levels. It will provide the undergraduate with a very useful template; assist the clinical nurse who will be faced with conflicting opinions about what is best for patient care; be a tremendous resource for those writing up research; and, finally, for those who consider themselves senior in the research field, might serve as a wake-up call.

One piece of advice I give frequently, particularly to those working in the field of evidence based medicine, is: 'To know what you don't know'. One might also add the advice: 'If you do know – what is the basis for your knowing and how sound is that basis?'. This book certainly provides an additional instrument in the toolkit of anyone who is setting out to look at knowledge and its acquisition. I look forward to the inevitable third edition, written in years to come, when those things we are certain about today are under scrutiny once more.

*Kevin Gournay CBE  
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July 2006*

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## Preface to the first edition

The reasons for writing this book are best summarised under three points:

- There is a distinct absence of books that focus specifically on critiquing nursing research.
- There is an increasing requirement for nurses to become conversant with research, understand its link with the use of evidence to underpin practice and move towards being an evidence-based discipline.
- A crucial aspect of this increased ‘mindfulness’ of research is an awareness of the contemporary research issues facing nursing and the wider policy, multidisciplinary and political contexts in which these issues are embedded.

Consequently, we feel that having read this book readers should gain an appropriate knowledge and awareness pertaining to these three points. Nurses should be more familiar with some of the approaches and techniques involved in critiquing nursing research and be able to utilise some of these skills and techniques in their own efforts to critique. Accordingly, they will be better placed to make informed judgements regarding the quality of the research paper and the value of the evidence reported. Finally, they should also be able to locate the critiqued paper(s) within the wider policy, multidisciplinary and political contexts.

The book is divided into four integrated parts.

- Part 1 contains chapters which set the context and background to critiquing nursing research, explain the purpose and value of the critiquing process and describe the evolution of the Network for Psychiatric Nursing Research (NPNR) and its National Journal Club.
- Part 2 is comprised of a range of approaches used to critique nursing research and identifies the strengths and limitations of these approaches. Each approach is also accompanied by two examples of critiques, which are based on critiques undertaken by the NPNR National Journal Club.
- In Part 3, the NPNR National Journal Club’s approach to critiquing nursing research is described. Since this is a developmental approach, we provide two additional examples for each of the four stages identified (a total of 16 different critiques of nursing research papers are included throughout the book).

*Preface to the first edition*

- The final part contains a chapter which discusses contemporary trends and themes in psychiatric/mental health nursing research and considers the complex relationship between psychiatric/mental health nursing research and multidisciplinary, collaborative research in the formal area of 'psychiatric care'. It also looks at the responsibilities for research of both nurse researchers and non-researchers.

The reader will notice that the papers reviewed using the NPNR National Journal Club approach are presented after the reviews undertaken using a range of models. This sequence of reviews was carried out purposefully in this 'order' since we wanted an approach to evolve and develop out of the National Journal Club work. Having done so, we were able to compare and contrast our approach with this range of approaches.

*John R. Cutcliffe and Martin F. Ward  
November 2002*

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## Preface to the second edition

The authors of this book are delighted that we were asked to produce a second edition and that this provided the opportunity for updating and enhancing the original text. The justifications and rationales for writing a book about critiquing nursing research are just as applicable today as they were when we proposed the original edition. Indeed, if the number of papers published in the nursing (and health care) literature that focus on aspects of evidence-based practice are an indication, then it is evident that the rationales for writing this book are stronger than ever.

This edition retains the features which made the original a 'best seller' and we have added additional material in the hope that this expands the book's (to borrow a phrase from Tolkien's parlance) 'applicability'. In addition to reviewing and subsequently updating the material of the original text, we have added two further examples of approaches to critique along with examples. Interestingly, our extensive search identified no 'new' approach subsequent to the publication of the original text. However, these additional approaches further indicate the width and breadth of different approaches to critiquing research. Interestingly, the approach described by Polit *et al.* (2001) underpins our original arguments *vis à vis* the underdevelopment of approaches specifically designed to critique qualitative research studies, and simultaneously illustrates the work that yet remains to be done in that paradigm.

The additional chapter on how to critique research as part of the work of preparing a dissertation arose in response to the requests of students and adds further applicability to critiquing *per se*. The chapter on European psychiatric nursing research is a specific attempt to acknowledge and respond to trends in global health and international nursing, and not least, the increasing recognition that to limit one's scope to a particular country (or continent) is to set artificial and highly limiting boundaries on knowledge utilisation and knowledge transfer. Last but not least, Professor Kevin Gournay has written the Foreword to the second Edition, complementing the first provided by Professor Allison Kitson. As with the original book, we welcome feedback and comment and review and hope that such information might inform the production of a third edition.

*John Cutcliffe and Martin Ward*  
*September 2006*

*Preface to the second edition*

## **Reference**

Polit, D. F., Beck, C. T. and Hungler, B. P. (2001) *Essentials of Nursing Research: Methods, Appraisal and Utilization*, 5th edn. Lippincott, Philadelphia.



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# Acknowledgements

This book could not have been produced without the sterling commitment and efforts of the Journal Club coordinators and members. Accordingly, this book is a tribute to all your hard work.

We offer thanks to Annelie Guard and the previous administrators of the NPNR for their support in maintaining the journal club.

We are most grateful to both Alison and Kevin for writing insightful endorsements in their Forewords.

To all those people who offered helpful and constructive feedback and review comment, we offer our thanks.

And not least, we offer our most profound thanks to our publisher, Helena Raeside, whose patience and industry have helped make this second edition a reality.

*John Cutcliffe and Martin Ward  
September 2006*



PART I

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# **Background to psychiatric/ mental health nursing research and critiquing research**



# The growth of evidence-based practice and the importance of critiquing research

Man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life and not a secondary rationalization of instinctive drives (Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, 1945)

## The movement towards evidence-based practice

A son asks his father, 'How does petrol make your car work, daddy?'. The father, not wishing to confuse the little boy, and not really knowing himself, replies, 'Well, when the engine gets thirsty you put the petrol in and the engine drinks it. When it has had enough it feels better and it runs again – just like you'. The boy, not wholly convinced of this, asks further questions, so his father brings out a mechanics manual, then an encyclopaedia, and then takes the boy next door to talk to his neighbour. Finally, in exasperation, the father connects to the Internet and finds a web site that gives the answer the boy needs, at the level he needs it and in a way that not only makes sense to him but also is technically correct for his age and degree of understanding.

Many years later the boy, despite his father, becomes a mechanic. One day a customer asks him, 'How does petrol make my car work?'. If the son had learnt from his father and gone no further than making things up as he went along he would not have an answer to satisfy the customer's question. Fortunately, his studies and his training have taught him differently and he is able to provide an answer that equips the customer with the appropriate information. What is the morale of this story? Never listen to your parents? No – it is that there is an answer to every question, but sometimes you have to go to extraordinary lengths to find it and it is not possible to progress your understanding of life until you do.

How does this help us come to a conclusion about the significance of evidence-based mental health care? Perhaps more importantly, how can its implementation help individual practitioners? To answer these questions it is neces-