“We need to do research and shout about it – or fall behind”

Recently, I attended the European Respiratory Society conference. With 15,000 delegates, the conference was a valuable opportunity to discuss respiratory medicine and service developments, and to share ideas about practice.

I was amazed to see the vast range of research studies being carried out. Having attended previous conferences, I have never been so enthused and inspired by new ideas – these are exciting times for respiratory medicine.

While I was staggered by the quality and quantity of the research, I noticed there were few qualitative studies. This was not surprising given that it was a scientific event.

But what really struck me was the lack of nurses presenting new ideas or research studies.

It could be argued that these conferences are medically driven so nursing research will always take a back seat.

However, during the course of the conference I saw many presentations by physiotherapists. They presented large, robust and clinically significant research studies and chaired several sessions. Their presentations were attended by large audiences, and their work really stood out.

Yet, while many respiratory nurses are developing services across the UK, none of them was chairing sessions or presenting similarly large, robust clinical studies at the conference.

This was disappointing as nurses are the key service providers within respiratory care, and they should be seen and heard in large numbers at these kind of events.

I’m a clinical nurse specialist, with an MSc and have been in respiratory medicine for more than 10 years. I could have submitted an abstract – but I didn’t. My reasons are probably similar to all nurses. I lack protected time, I do not have anyone actively encouraging me to carry out research and, crucially, I do not feel under pressure to carry out research.

However, having seen how physiotherapists are promoting their work so impressively, I now believe research needs to be a higher professional priority for nurses.

I also feel that, while nurses have to take some responsibility for promoting their work, professional bodies should also be supporting and actively assisting them to lead research studies.

We need to make sure that we are describing, measuring and comparing what we do at an international level. If we fail to do this, then the implications could be that we will fall behind our colleagues and our profession will not get the recognition it deserves.

In these times of heightened scrutiny, what we do needs to be published and we need to shout its value from the rooftops.

I know the idea of doing research can be a turn-off for nurses. But now is the time for the profession and the organisations that support it to start taking nurse research seriously.

Sexual health is one of those taboo subjects that can make health professionals and patients squirm but it isn’t just about avoiding infections and unwanted pregnancies or achieving planned pregnancies. Sexual health is also central to physical and mental health, even for people who are sexually inactive.

Nurses need to be able to discuss sexual health with their patients, and to do so in a non-judgemental way that makes patients feel able to disclose problems or seek advice. Our practice review on page 20 offers advice on how to do this in daily practice.

Your ability to discuss sexual health confidently and without embarrassment could enable your patients to disclose problems that are easily addressed but that they might otherwise keep silent about.

Overcoming your embarrassment might just transform the lives of some of your patients.

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