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Building a Community Nursing Research Community of Practice

By Ben Bowers ¹ and Catherine Evans ²

Most health and social care is provided to adults at home and in care homes. The need for community nursing has rapidly risen during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a 41% increase in people dying at home (O'Donnell et al, 2021), and many more people have experienced conditions and health issues requiring community nursing interventions. However, there is a dearth of nurses leading and contributing to research on community healthcare and generating evidence to underpin care. Lack of evidence impedes policymakers in commissioning high-quality community healthcare and optimising outcomes for patients and their families. This editorial seeks to establish a Community of Practice for Community Nursing Research working group, collaborating with key partners such as the [Queen's Nursing Institute](#) and [International Collaboration for Community Health Nursing Research](#). The Community of Practice would create a forum to share ideas, network and build research capacity in community nurse-led research.

Nurse-led research is vital in generating high-quality evidence that answers priority research questions for patients, families and practitioners. The impact of community nursing research on clinical care extends back to past community nursing leaders, like Lisbeth Hockey (1918-2004) (Royal College of Nursing Archive, 2022), to current and future leaders that are conducting research to enhance the provision of high-quality community healthcare (Griffiths et al, 2015; Bowers et al, 2021; Evans et al, 2021). The recent Community Nursing Research Priority Setting Partnership between community nurses and the James Lind Alliance is a great example of the power of engaging practitioners to drive the research agenda forward (James Lind Alliance Priority Setting Partnership, 2021). The Partnership was led by senior community nurses and supported by the 70@70 National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) Senior Nurse and Midwife Research Leader Programme. The Partnership identified the top ten research evidence priorities for community nursing, with the number one priority being: 'How can community nurse teams better meet the complex needs of patients with multiple health conditions?' (James Lind Alliance Priority Setting

Partnership, 2021). These questions tell us about what matters most to patients, families and community nurses, and can inform priorities for research funders.

A policy priority for the NHS is to grow and support nurse-led research across care settings. In 2021, NHS England launched 'Making research matter: the Chief Nursing Officer for England's strategic plan for research' (NHS England, 2021). The ambition is to "create a people-centred research environment that empowers nurses to lead, participate in, and deliver research ... for public benefit" (NHS England, 2021). There is opportunity to build on this growing momentum and advance community nurse-led research. Historically, community nurses have had limited opportunities to pursue research (NHS England, 2021). The lack of opportunity, role models and mentorship in research means community nurses can lack the confidence and experience to get involved. Valuable studies can experience considerable delays when community nurses lack the time and confidence to engage in research activities (Barclay et al, 2019). Consequently, the evidence to inform community-based nursing care remains underdeveloped, and nurses must draw on research conducted primarily in hospital-based settings, often with different patient populations (Bowers, 2018; NHS England, 2021).

We invite community nurses and clinical academics to work with us and key partners to form a Community Nursing Research Community of Practice. The Community of Practice is for all community nurses, regardless of experience with research. Our intention is to be inclusive and reflect the priorities of members. A similar community of practice for trainees in palliative medicine was formed to share and build research activities, such as audits of practice at scale and engagement in research projects. Our Community of Practice would aim to strengthen research capacity in community-based nursing research through similar activities and promoting and supporting opportunities for doctoral research from the [NIHR School for Primary Care Research](#) , [School for Social Care Research](#) and the [NIHR integrated clinical academic pathway](#).

We invite you to get in touch by email or Twitter to get involved and build the community.

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