EDITORIAL

Alan Pearson: a pioneer of evidence-based care

As a young nurse, Alan Pearson had a problem. Working in the North Tees General Hospital in England in the 1970’s, Alan noticed the high incidence of pressure sores amongst patients under his care. At that time, clinical practice was almost exclusively based on knowledge garnered during tertiary education and the experiences of those who had gone before; there was very little investigation into the efficacy of the interventions and practices that were currently in use. It was also around this time that the Welsh physician, Archibald (Archie) Cochrane published his seminal work “Effectiveness and Efficiency”, lamenting the general lack of knowledge gained through applied medical research. Though Cochrane’s lament was directed towards practicing physicians and public health officials, his argument resonated with professionals from other health disciplines – with Alan Pearson especially so.

Rather than seeking advice on pressure sores from his peers, which was the common course of action adopted by his colleagues, Alan looked to the available research literature to guide him towards the most effective treatments that would best help his patients. He then took the radical yet critical step of following through and implementing the treatment that, through evaluation of the evidence, he considered the most effective. The seed planted by Archie Cochrane had taken root and Alan Pearson’s mission was clear: nursing practice needed to be informed by evidence.

In 1996, Professor Alan Pearson founded the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI), then known as the Joanna Briggs Institute for Evidence-Based Nursing, to fulfill this mission. Professor Pearson proposed that the JBI would not only conduct systematic reviews on topics relevant to nursing practice, similar to those conducted by the Cochrane Collaboration to inform medical treatment and therapy, but that it would also work to implement and translate that evidence into practice with the view of directly improving outcomes for patients. What began as a small group of dedicated academics and seven Collaborating Centers in Australia and Asia has now grown to a motivated and close-knit team at the JBI in Adelaide, and a vast collaborative network encompassing 73 entities in 29 countries across the globe. No longer focused on nursing alone, under Professor Pearson’s leadership the JBI has evolved to address the need for evidence-informed healthcare across all disciplines, always addressing its primary objective to synthesize, disseminate and utilize the best available research evidence to inform clinical decision-making and improve health outcomes.

The strengths of the JBI are many, and are reflected in the content of the JBI Database of Systematic Reviews and Implementation Reports. Where other organizations in the field of evidence-based healthcare tackle only part of the problem, the JBI is currently the only organization in the world that works in a systematic fashion to synthesize, disseminate, and implement evidence to affect practice change. We publish evidence of the effectiveness of interventions, but recognize that effectiveness alone is only part of the story. Professor Pearson was instrumental in the development of novel methodologies to enable the synthesis of different types of data, notably pioneering an approach for the synthesis of qualitative research, and today evidence of the meaningfulness, appropriateness and feasibility of interventions can also be found within the pages of this journal. Demonstrably, this month we publish a comprehensive systematic review that investigates not only the effectiveness of breast-feeding support interventions for women from disadvantaged groups, but also the meaningfulness of these interventions for mothers.

The Joanna Briggs Institute is perhaps the greatest legacy from an extraordinary four decade-long career that is replete with achievements and accolades. This month we bid a final farewell to Professor Alan Pearson and wish him all the very best in his retirement. His contributions to evidence-based healthcare are immense and we as editors are honored to help continue with his vision through the publication of this journal, for many years to come.
Dr Karolina Lisy BSc(Hons), PhD
Research Fellow, The Joanna Briggs Institute
Section Editor, JBI Database of Systematic Reviews and Implementation Reports

References

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