Overview

- Nurses are leading research on evidence-based improvements to care and translating research findings into practice. Nurse researchers hold a registered nurse (RN) degree as well as a PhD or DNP, and bring both clinical and scientific discovery expertise to the researcher role.  
- Nurse researchers are sought by several sectors, including academia, health care organizations and the biomedical industry.
- Only 1% of the more than three million registered nurses in the United States are nurse researchers.
- It is projected that nurse researchers will have an occupation growth rate of 19% by the year 2022, significantly faster than the average 7% occupation growth rate among U.S. industries.
- At least one full-time doctorally prepared nurse researcher is recommended for a 500-bed hospital. A nurse researcher is estimated to save a 500-bed hospital more than $8 million over a 4-year period through cost avoidance: educating and facilitating direct care nurses to transform clinical questions into meaningful cost-saving projects.

Important to Fund Research on U.S. Health Care System

A type of research called health care delivery research seeks to translate discoveries from research into medical practice. How important do you think it is for the United States to invest in health care delivery research?

- Very important: 31%
- Somewhat important: 38%
- Not too important: 11%
- Not at all important: 3%
- Not sure: 18%

Innovative Research or Studies

Fall Prevention

In 2008, average cost of an inpatient fall that results in an injury is over $6,000 and leads to an average of an additional 7.5 inpatient days per fall. Nurse researchers led a retrospective study that showed a 59% reduction in the incidence of falls after hospitals conducted staff education and established a dedicated safety nurse. Safety fall prevention programs project to save $354,000 annually for a 500-bed hospital based on average fall rate reported by AHA.

Unpowered Exoskeletal Harnesses

The National Institute of Nursing Research supported a collaboration between Carnegie Mellon University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, which designed an innovative lightweight ankle exoskeleton. The ankle exoskeleton harnesses the power of a person’s own muscles, leading to a reduction of the energy cost of walking by 7.2 percent, equivalent to taking off a 10-pound backpack.

Created Opportunities for Parent Empowerment (COPE)

Created Opportunities for Parent Empowerment, or COPE, decreased the length of Newborn Intensive Care Unit hospitalization for infants by approximately 4 days, which translated to reduced associated hospital costs of $4,800 per infant. In infants under 32 weeks gestation, the net savings was about 8 fewer days in the NICU per infant, or nearly $10,000.

Sources:
1. Nature 522, 507-509
2. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics
3. Nursing Economics, 31(4), 194-197
4. Nursing Economics, 26(3), 179-187
5. Oberman K. et al. AACN 2011
6. Nursing Economics, 31(4), 194-197
7. Clinical Nurse Specialist, 25(2), 75-95
8. National Institute of Nursing Research
“Too many of our global citizens have diminished prospects for attaining optimal health. In my research, I examine social determinants that impact health inequities. Socioeconomic disadvantages derived from living in poverty, limited educational opportunities, and historical discriminatory practices drive public health problems such as intimate partner violence, HIV/AIDS and substance use. It is important to expand our currently narrow research agendas to allow for multi-level approaches to solving these complex public health problems.”

The Bottom Line

Nurse scientists are experts in symptom management, end-of-life and palliative care. Empowering their discoveries is vital to prevent disease and disability, saving lives and costs to the health of all Americans. With our nation’s changing demographics and NIH’s heavy emphasis on team science, a unique nursing perspective is needed to accelerate science-based solutions.

Looking into the Future

- Institute of Medicine report The Future of Nursing set goals to double the number of nurses with a doctorate and increase proportion of nurses with baccalaureate degrees to 80% by 2020 to add to the cadre of nurse faculty and researchers.9
- Assessing Progress on the Future of Nursing, a report from the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine, recommends more emphasis on increasing the number of doctorally prepared nurses and supporting academic pathways toward the baccalaureate degree. Moreover, to maximize the potential value of their additional education, nurses should be encouraged to pursue these degrees early in their careers.10