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**What nurses understand by the term
evidence-based practice, and how it shapes
their clinical decision making.**

A thesis presented as partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

There are professional and legislative expectations that nurses deliver care to their patients' that is evidence-based. Previous research findings have indicated nurses do not value research in the clinical setting, yet believed they deliver evidence-based practice.

This study explores what practising nurses understand by the term evidence-based practice and how it shapes their clinical decision making. There was interest in the individual nurses' experiences and interpretations, as well as their preparation for practice. Contextual influences were also a focus, to give insight into influences that might affect the delivery of evidence-based practice.

A qualitative interpretive research approach was used, and implemented using a naturalistic paradigm. Case Study methodology, using complexity theory, provided the theoretical framework to explore contextual variables that might affect the delivery of evidence-based practice. Relationships, interdependencies and interconnections became the focus to allow a depth to the inquiry and understanding of the case. A review of the literature, focus group and semi-structured interviews ($n=10$), provided the source of data collection, and were completed during 2006.

Despite evidence-based practice being a professional and legislative requirement of the practising nurse, there remains a significant gap between what the professional and legislative documents state and the reality of clinical practice. The extent to which evidence-based practice is delivered within the case is based on the extent to which evidence is incorporated in policy statements. There are concerns associated with education, organisational culture, and contextual variables which impede the delivery of evidence-based practice. Existing skill levels are variable, and there is potential to encourage individual creativity and contribution, but there are significant skill deficits which need to be addressed.

Findings confirm progress is being made, but also reinforce the need for further education review and support, and a culture 'makeover' in some contexts within the case to advance the evidence-based practice agenda.

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What nurses understand by the term evidence-based practice, and how it shapes their clinical decision making.

Table of Contents

Chapter One:	Introduction	Page
1.1	Personal Information	2
1.2	Justification for the research	3
1.3	Personal comment	4
1.4	Structure	6
Chapter Two:	Literature Review	8
2.1	Introduction to Complexity Theory	9
2.2	Evidence-based Nursing Practice	14
2.3	Clinical Decision Making	24
Chapter Three:	Research Methods	32
3.1	Establishing the research question	32
3.1.1	Personal factors	34
3.2	Research questions	35
3.3	Qualitative Research	36
3.4	Case Study Research	38
3.4.1	The Case	41
3.4.2	The participants	41

3.5	Ethics	43
3.6	Research Design	45
3.7	Data Analysis	47
Chapter Four:	Findings	50
4.1	Background and clinical context	51
4.2	Learning Backgrounds – Individuals’ preparation for practice	51
4.3	Discussion around what evidence-based practice is	54
4.3.1	Is evidence-based practiced implemented	55
4.4	Information literacy skills and their effects	59
4.5	Clinical decision making, what informs or influences it	62
4.6	What are the challenges/constraints in delivering evidence-based practice	63
4.7	An overall analysis of the data using a complexity theory lens	68
Chapter Five:	Discussion	81
	Individual preparation for the implementation of evidence-based practice	81
5.1	Understanding of evidence-based practice	82
5.2	Education – factors that support and promote the implementation of evidence-based practice	85
5.2.1	Reflective practice	86
5.2.2	Questioning practice	88
5.2.3	Research education	89
5.2.4	Information literacy	91
5.2.5	Translation of skills into practice	93

	Complexity of the clinical area and factors that may influence the implementation of, evidence-based practice	94
5.3	The culture of context	94
5.3.1	Culture of inquiry	94
5.3.2	Relationships	95
5.3.3	Infrastructure support	99
5.4	Leadership	100
5.5	Ethics	104
Chapter Six:	Conclusions and Recommendations	107
6.1	Limitations of the study	107
6.2	Personal Assumptions revisited	108
6.3	Recommendations	112
6.4	Suggestions for further research activity.	113
	Bibliography	115
Appendices:		
1	Information sheet for participants	
2	Consent form for participants	
3	Anticipated list of questions for the focus group and individual interviews.	