

**The following overview is reprinted from the *American Journal of Nursing*,
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The State of the Science on Nursing Research

Report from Washington, DC.

Editor's note: AJN *enlisted a team of writers and editors to attend a national meeting of nurse researchers. Conference highlights are presented here, and highlights of specific nursing research will appear in future issues of AJN and other journals published by Lippincott Williams & Wilkins. The reporters included Linda Flynn, PhD, RN, BC, for Home Healthcare Nurse; Margaret Freda, PhD, RN, FAAN, editor of MCN, The American Journal of Maternal/Child Nursing; Gayle Page, DNSc, RN, FAAN and Virginia Tilden, DNSc, RN, FAAN, for Nursing Research; and writing for AJN, Diana J. Mason, PhD, RN, FAAN, editor-in-chief, Maureen Shawn Kennedy, MA, RN, news director, Katherine Kany, BS, RN, Laurie Lewis, and Emily Pihlquist.*

Some say image is everything, and the stereotypic images of the nurse—from the angelic heroine to the sex kitten to the bossy battle-ax—rarely include the scientist. But the growing body of nursing research may soon change the public's impression of nurses.

Under a banner proclaiming “Nursing Science: Working Toward a Healthier Nation,” Patricia Grady, PhD, RN, FAAN, director of the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR) welcomed more than 750 nurse scholars and researchers to the Third National Congress on the State of the Science in Nursing Research in Washington, DC, October 7. Presented by the Council for the Advancement of Nursing Science (CANS) and the NINR, this biennial event showcases new work by nurse scientists (more than 300 presentations and posters this year) and provides a networking forum for researchers.

Grady told the group that their work is being increasingly recognized by colleagues in nursing and other disciplines, and not just in nursing publications—more than 50% of nursing research by NINR-funded investigators is published in non-nursing journals. Nurses, she said, focus on “patient-oriented research,” which is at the heart of the research agenda of the National Institutes of Health (NIH): managing the effects of chronic illness, reducing health disparities, using new technology to advance health, increasing the quality of end-of-life care. With a new focus on interdisciplinary research, the NIH is relying more and more upon nurses to lead interdisciplinary research teams, mainly, Grady says, because nurses are skilled at team building.

“What is the impact of what we do?” When Grady posed this question to the group, she was referring to the work of nurse researchers as a whole, but it's also the question most nurse researchers are examining in their studies: how do nurses influence patient outcomes?

The impact of nurses' absence in health care was discussed in the opening session, in which Mary Blegen, PhD, RN, FAAN, associate dean for research affairs at

the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center School of Nursing, detailed findings from a literature review she conducted, examining the impact of nurse staffing on patient outcomes. While data exist showing higher rates of nosocomial infections, falls, and skin breakdown when nurse staffing is reduced, Blegen told researchers that more studies must be done. She reinforced the need for standardizing definitions of staffing and for including cost-effectiveness measures when studying nurse staffing and patient outcomes, in order to convince hospitals that it's worthwhile to have an adequate number of nurses on staff.

A plenary panel on health disparities highlighted research being conducted at several nursing centers, including the University of Washington School of Nursing (Seattle), the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing (Philadelphia) and the University of California–Los Angeles. Presenters emphasized the need for involving the community as real partners in the research and for tailoring the design and focus according to the specific community, keeping in mind that one size does not fit all. Loretta Sweet Jemmott, PhD, RN, FAAN, from the University of Pennsylvania, giving the group a crash course on her research studying HIV prevention, exhorted researchers to spend time getting to know the communities they are researching, otherwise they might miss the questions in the community most in need of research. And she emphasized the importance of research findings making their way into the hands of practicing clinicians. She encouraged the researchers to publish not only in research journals but also in broad-based clinical publications, chiding the group that nurse researchers are “the only ones who read nursing research journals.”

Highlights of nursing research presented at the conference include the following:

- Jemmott's research on what educational interventions work best with black women to reduce unsafe sex and prevent sexually transmitted diseases among them
- Kathleen Rice Simpson's randomized trial examining at what point in second-stage labor nurses should encourage a woman to push, and what the effects are on the fetus
- Mary Jo Grap's evaluation of the effect of elevating the head of the bed on development of ventilator-associated pneumonia
- Chandice Covington's study of whether breast milk produced by elderly African women could be an adequate nutritional source for children whose mothers have AIDS
- Elizabeth Corwin's study examining the relationship of fatigue to postpartum depression in women with no history of depression
- Nancy Woods's research into the genetics of menopausal symptoms
- Judith McFarlane's study of interventions that reduce the incidence of domestic violence against women

In the final plenary session, Mary Kerr, PhD, RN, FAAN, director of the center of nursing research at the University of Pittsburgh School of Nursing, challenged the researchers to “think bigger” and to pay attention to new technologies. She encouraged researchers to be involved in developing the clinical applications of new technologies such as nanotechnology, in which monitoring and interventions can be implemented at the molecular level.

What became clear in the conference presentations is that nurse researchers do pay attention to the issues important to patients and families, from birth and infant feeding to cooking healthier foods and providing care for elderly family members. Judging from the myriad conversations taking place in small alcoves, over lunch tables and in hallways, it also seemed clear that there will be no shortage of new research for the next conference in 2006.— written by *Maureen Shawn Kennedy, MA, RN, news director*

For More Information

American Academy of Nursing

www.aannet.org

Council for the Advancement of Nursing Science (CANS)

www.nursingscience.org

National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR)

<http://ninr.nih.gov/ninr>