Like many nurses, I have avoided participating in nursing research. While Tingen, Burnett, Murchison, and Zhu (2009) emphasized the importance of nursing research, research has always seemed like too big of a time and energy commitment for me to get involved. My concern regarding the knowledge level needed to conduct research and to make a significant contribution to the science of nursing was a misperception. One tends to believe only those with a doctoral degree/education can participate and make significant contributions in research. Surprisingly, participating in research was much easier than I thought. Not only was it easier than anticipated, but the experience also provided unexpected benefits for all involved, from the primary researcher and nurse educator to the nursing students.

The Onsite Research Partner’s Perspective

It started with a simple message on one of the group email discussion lists to which I subscribe. A doctoral student was seeking a site where she could conduct research for her dissertation. Although I was hesitant at first, I agreed to see what I could do to assist her.

First, I did a quick review of the literature on the subject of nursing research because I am a firm believer in the concept that knowledge is power. The more I knew, the more I would be able to deal with whatever difficulties might arise as I assumed this new role of onsite research partner. Anderson, Dixon, Lewallen, and Jarrett-Pulliam (2011) provide excellent guidelines for performing collaborative research. Conn (2010) goes further to suggest that collaborative research makes effective use of limited resources, especially given the current economic downturn. Participating in research has demonstrated benefits for undergraduate students such as outstanding performance, obtaining a baccalaureate degree, and pursuit of graduate degrees. Research has been associated with both tenure and promotions for faculty members (Jones, Barlow, & Villarejo, 2010; Maas, Conn, Buckwalter, Herr, & Tripp-Reimer, 2009; Reising, 2008). The literature review convinced me of the benefits of assisting with research as an onsite research partner and led to the commitment to assist the doctoral student with the project.

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It's Easier Than You Think!  
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**The Study**

The doctoral student’s (primary researcher's) proposed project was a study entitled “A Comparison of the Efficacy of Computer-Based vs. High-Fidelity Mannequin Simulation in Improving Clinical Judgment in Nursing Education.” In the first part of the study, half of the participants would complete a self-directed computer-based simulation in the computer lab and the other group was asked to complete an instructor led small-group simulation using SimMan® in the simulation/skills laboratory. Each simulation was approximately one hour in length. Four weeks later, each participant would then complete both a computer-based and a mannequin simulation. A calculated score based upon specific actions performed by the students determined competency. Both the onsite research partner and the primary researcher collected the data. Data analysis was to be performed at a later time by the primary researcher and published in her doctoral thesis.

**Overcoming Participation Obstacles**

**Gaining commitment from leadership regarding participation.** The first hurdle was obtaining a commitment from the rest of the nursing department. The onsite research partner is employed at a community college in a rural area. The nursing student body is relatively small with a total of 100 nursing students split between 50 practical nursing (PN) students and 50 associate degree nursing (ADN) students. The department was short staffed following the unexpected retirement of one instructor, thus making the number of faculty hours required for the research an area of concern. Once it was explained to the department head that the project could be used to replace the simulation the nursing program had already scheduled for that quarter (thereby reducing the number of faculty hours needed for the research), the first obstacle was overcome.

**Engaging the students.** The next obstacle to overcome was obtaining “informed consent” from the ADN students who would be acting as research participants. A letter explaining the purpose of the research to be conducted and the benefits to be gained from being a participant was distributed to all 50 ADN students. In addition to this letter, weekly announcements were made in class, reminding students of the research and requesting their participation. The doctoral student and I were elated when all 50 students agreed to participate!

**Scheduling concerns.** The largest hurdle to overcome revolved around scheduling. As the students were in their final quarter of the nursing program, working around their various work and clinical schedules was a challenge. This was further complicated by the fact that both the primary researcher and the onsite research partner needed to work this project around their normal day-to-day routine. Flexibility and accessing resources were keys to resolving this issue. Co-workers were willing to lend a helping hand when needed, and students were willing to come in an hour earlier than usual or to trade times with other students in order to participate in the study.

Overcoming each of these barriers was made possible by remembering the importance of communication (Anderson et al., 2011). Because the primary researcher and the onsite research partner lived 3,000 miles and two time zones apart, frequent emails were vital in keeping the project on track. Electronic communication allowed all parties to work out details and timing of the study as well as to discuss any questions or concerns that arose. For example, when the first week of simulations was completed, it was evident that this program closely resembled a course currently being offered at the other site, and that a new research partner was needed. The onsite research partner was contacted and willingness to come in an hour earlier than usual or to trade times with other students in order to participate in the study.

**The Primary Researcher’s Perspective**

My dissertation proposal was written around the equipment, software, and curriculum of a particular nursing program; very late in the process, I learned that it would not be possible to conduct the research at that site. I needed to find another research site quickly, so I sent a query through an email discussion list to see if anyone would be interested in allowing the study to be conducted with their nursing students. I was thrilled to receive a positive response from the person who became the onsite research partner for the study. During our communication, it was evident that this program closely resembled the original study site in terms of size and curriculum. Early on in our discussions, it became clear that the new onsite research partner was detail-oriented and dedicated to doing things right; thus, trust developed quickly between the two research partners. There was concern that the amount of time required to get the second part of the research project done would discourage the onsite research partner, because it required doing one-on-one simulation with potentially 50 students over fewer than three days with only myself and the onsite research partner collecting data.

Over the course of several months, we corresponded by email to iron out the details and timing of the study as well as obtaining formal approval from both Columbia Basin College officials and Capella University Institutional Review Board to conduct the study. It was determined that while the research site had the hardware required for the study, it would be necessary to arrange to purchase, download, and install the software needed to conduct the study. The information technology support person at the research site made this seem like only a minor problem. The onsite research partner sent the dates and times students would be available for the simulations; together, we created a grid for getting the students through the project. The project required trust in the onsite research partner to make adjustments in the research schedule due to changes in clinical schedules, tests, and other issues that arose at the last minute. Ultimately, in conducting this project long-distance rather than locally (as originally planned), the primary researcher gained a friend and colleague that she would probably never have had occasion to meet. We shared experiences and learned that we had many things in

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common despite teaching in programs thousands of miles apart.

The Students’ Perspective

To determine how students felt about this experience, an attitudinal survey was developed. A questionnaire initially used by Campisi and Finn (2011) was adapted and some wording was modified to make the questionnaire more relevant to the situation. The survey asked students to rate four statements using a standard Likert scale (ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). The results of this survey (shown in Table 1) reflect some small gains in changing the students’ perception of nursing research.

The students were asked to write comments on the attitudinal survey of how this experience affected their attitude toward participating in research and also to describe perceived barriers to participation in nursing research in the future. One of the representative students replied, “I thought the study would be more organized.” With regard to perceived barriers to future participation, the students most frequently cited time and scheduling. Although the survey results were less encouraging than hoped for; it provided valuable insight on how we could improve research efforts in the future. The survey results highlighted the importance of involving the students earlier in the process to obtain greater support for the study.

Advice for Others

The primary researcher and onsite research partner would like to offer advice to our colleagues based on our experience. First, be open to the idea of participating in research. Despite some initial reservations, I, the onsite research partner, soon learned that saying “yes” yielded tremendous benefits. As an educator, I was able to gain greater knowledge about the research process, improve my self-confidence, and obtain valuable information regarding how best to educate students at my facility. Secondly, seek out and utilize resources. We were able to connect with each other through subscribing to an email discussion list. Many concerns were easily addressed by doing a quick literature search. Nursing students, co-workers, and even vendors were able to provide assistance when needed. Communicate, communicate, and communicate! By involving the students earlier in the process, it is more likely that they would have found the experience to be both more organized and more enjoyable. When in doubt, ask. This is especially true when it comes to who is going to do what and when. Lastly, believe in yourself. We are nurses! We are trained to recognize problems and develop ways to solve them. As such, we are already experts in practical research techniques. We just need to step out of our comfort zone and take advantage of the many opportunities for nursing research out there.

Nursing research is crucial to the future of our profession and nursing students represent its future. It is critical that these future professionals be exposed to and given the opportunity to develop an appreciation for this aspect of our profession (Tingen et al., 2009). As nurses, it is our responsibility to overcome our reservations and get involved with our newest members in nursing research. With good communication and utilization of existing resources, obstacles are easily overcome. When one is willing to say “yes” to nursing research, students and nursing faculty, researchers, and the nursing profession all benefit from the results. Try it. It’s easier than you think!

References


Joan M. Guercia, MSN, BS, AMSN-RNC, is an Assistant Professor of Nursing, Columbia Basin College, Pasco, WA.

Beverly J. Howard, MSN, RN, FNP-BC, is a Family Nurse Practitioner, Pasadena Health Center, and an Associate Degree Nursing Instructor, San Jacinto College Central Campus, Pasadena, TX.