

School Nursing EBP Clinical Guidelines

What They Are and Are Not, and Why They Matter

Robin Adair Shannon, DNP, RN, NCSN, PHNA-BC

Quality school nursing practice should be evidence-based. However registered nurses in autonomous school nursing practice have limited capacities to access, synthesize, and implement the best evidence into practice. Clinical guidelines are important tools to reduce barriers to evidence-based practice (EBP) and support the delivery of high-quality school nursing care. The purpose of this article is to outline what EBP clinical guidelines are, are not, and why they matter.

Keywords: school nursing; evidence-based practice, clinical guidelines

What Are Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) Clinical Guidelines?

How can I use EBP clinical guidelines to improve the quality of my school nursing practice? At first glance, these seem like simple questions with obvious answers. But upon honest reflection, how many school nurses really know? How many think they know, but their answers are based on assumptions or misinformation? This article will set the facts straight about what EBP clinical guidelines are, what they are not, and why they matter to your school nursing practice.

Quality school nursing practice should be evidence-based. However, registered nurses in autonomous school nursing practice have limited time, resources, and skills to access, synthesize, and implement

the best evidence into practice (Maughan & Yonkaitis, 2017). Clinical guidelines are important tools to reduce these barriers to EBP and support the delivery of high-quality nursing care in the school setting (Adams & McCarthy, 2007). Evidence-based practice clinical guidelines are defined as “specific practice recommendations grouped together that have been derived from a methodologically rigorous review of the best evidence on a specific topic” (Melnyk & Fineout-Overholt, 2015, p. 12).

Quality clinical practice guidelines should:

- contain systematically developed recommendations, strategies, or other information to assist health care decision making in specific clinical circumstances
- be produced in association with a relevant professional organization
- include a systematic literature search of peer-reviewed journals
- contain an assessment of the benefits and harms of recommended and alternative care
- be developed, reviewed, or revised within the last 5 years (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2014).

EBP clinical guidelines include essential components developed through

standardized, systematic, and rigorous strategies. Quality EBP clinical guidelines should:

- outline the rationale for the clinical guidelines
- specify the health condition and etiology
- search, assemble, and synthesize the literature
- critically appraise the evidence
- provide practice recommendations
- be reviewed by an independent panel of experts before dissemination (AGREE Next Steps Consortium, 2013; Institute of Medicine, 2016; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2016).

What EBP Clinical Guidelines Are Not

There are several important school nursing practice tools that might innocently enough be considered clinical guidelines but are not—because they do not meet the strict criteria outlined previously. Even when grounded on the best evidence available, practice tools such as school nursing position statements, district school health policies, school nursing protocols, and procedure skills checklists should not be confused with clinical practice guidelines. Student education and health plans such as individualized education plans and

individualized healthcare plans, emergency action plans, and medical management order sets should also be evidence-based but are not considered clinical guidelines. Published peer-reviewed research studies, integrative literature reviews, case study reports, health issue overviews, resource manuals, and textbooks are also not equivalent to clinical guidelines—even though they contribute to the evidence base and are extremely important to understanding student health issues.

Why Do EBP Clinical Guidelines Matter?

Clinical guidelines are an important tenant of the principle of Standards of Practice within NASN's (2016) Framework for 21st-Century Nursing Practice, which guides school nursing practice to improve health and educational outcomes for students. Yet to date, NASN has developed one clinical guideline for asthma (Maughan & Schantz, 2014). To address this deficit, NASN has initiated a project to develop and pilot a Model for Developing EBP School Nursing Clinical Guidelines according to the rigorous criteria and methods outlined previously. The aim of this important initiative is that school nurse scholars will employ this standardized methodology to build a

repository of EBP clinical guidelines for use by practicing school nurses. Stay tuned! ■

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**Robin Adair Shannon, DNP, RN,
NCSN, PHNA-BC
Clinical Assistant Professor
University of Illinois at Chicago College
of Nursing
Chicago, IL**

Dr. Shannon is a clinical assistant professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago College of Nursing. She teaches the two theory classes in the UIC School Nurse Certificate Program, Education Perspectives in School Nursing and School Nursing Theories and Trends.