

Nurses are pivotal to facilitating research in the intensive care unit

Joanne G. Outtrim

University Division of Anaesthesia, University of Cambridge

Background

NHS England aims to support improvements in patient outcome through research. Thankfully patients are now surviving critical illnesses, from which they would have previously died. It is therefore essential that research be established as part of the culture of intensive care and part of normal clinical practice, as patients benefit from attending hospitals that are research active (Ozdemir et al., 2015).

In the UK, the National Institute Health Research (NIHR) provides support and education for funded clinical research nurses through the Clinical Research Network. The recent NIHR Clinical Research Strategy (Hamer, 2017) aims to create a clinical research culture focused on patients and the public, whilst encouraging research nurses to promote innovation in practice whilst improving patient care.

The delivery of high-quality research care is ideally supported by high level Trust Research Governance Strategies, which documents the integration of highly skilled research nurses into clinical care (Meachin, 2017, Whitehouse and Smith, 2018).



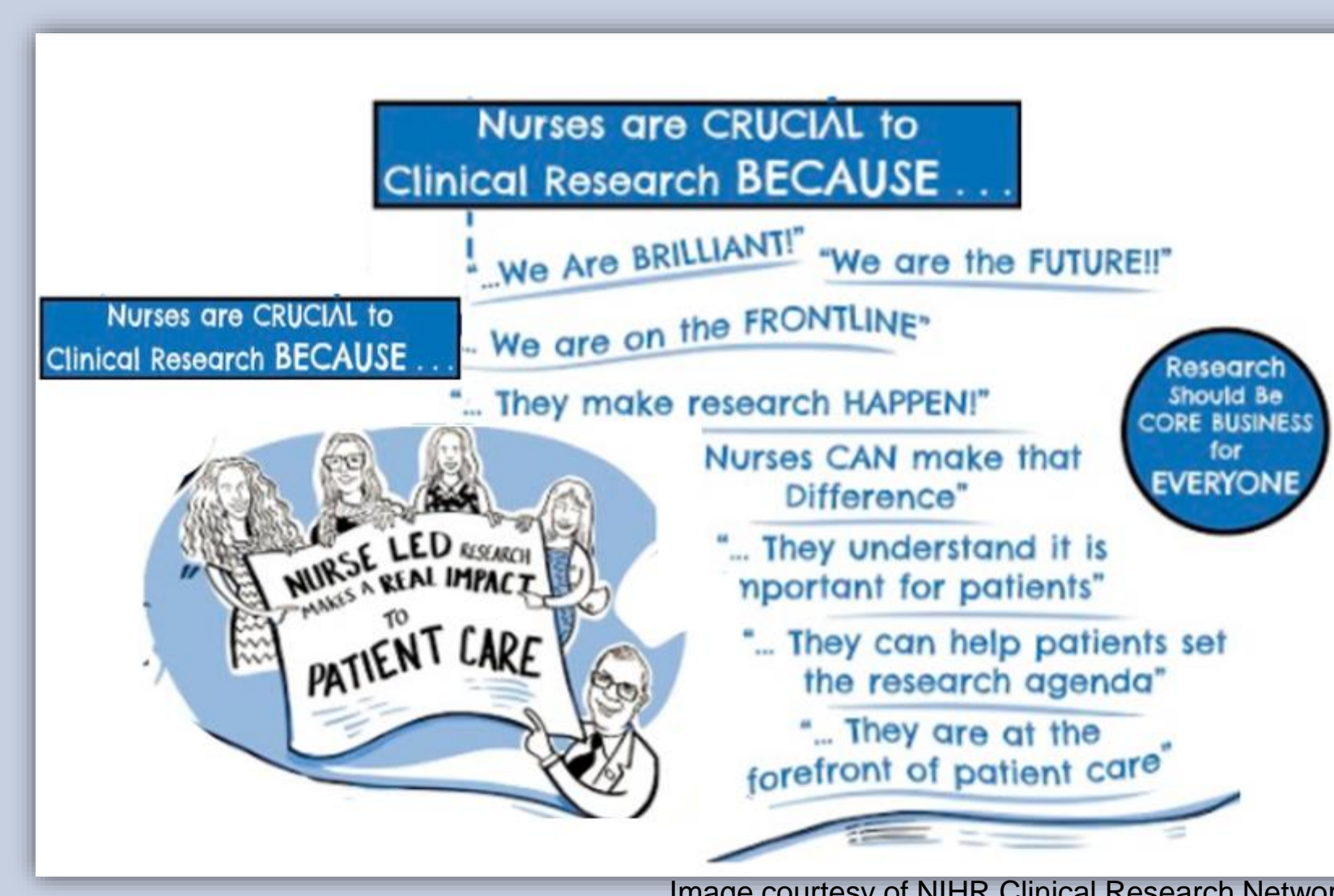
Image courtesy of NIHR Clinical Research Network

Complex critical care environment

Studies in the intensive care unit have an added complexity including the urgency of enrolling acutely ill patients, who may be unable to consent for themselves into studies, with families often asked, at short notice, for their advice regarding enrolment into a study. To be able to deliver studies in the intensive care unit (ICU), research nurses not only need to have in-depth knowledge of their speciality, have excellent communication skills, but also be flexible, ideally providing a 24/7 service for recruitment and study related tasks.

This is where critical care research nurses excel, as they are often experienced nurses who are looking to inform their own practice and improve the care they provide to their patients.

To facilitate the recruitment of critically ill patients, and subsequent successful delivery of complex studies, it is essential that there is active engagement with, and support by the clinical care team. Given the challenges of critical care it is essential that clinical research nurses are embedded within clinical teams, ultimately to improve the experience and outcomes of patients and their families (Birch et al., 2017).



Conclusion

Research nurses working in the ICU develop a wide range of skills, autonomous working, whilst often taking the lead in implementing studies in the ICU. Combining their clinical background with their research experience provides an opportunity to develop research ideas. Critical care research nurses should be encouraged to lead on and conduct their own studies, sharing their expertise, ensuring that research doesn't continue to be seen as an added extra, but as an essential part of normal clinical care.

References

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jgo22@cam.ac.uk