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COMMENTARY

Feasibility Studies: What They Are, How They Are Done, and What We Can Learn From Them

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Nursing clinical research is a growing field, and as more nurses become engaged in conducting clinical research, feasibility studies may be their first encounter. Understanding what they are, how to conduct them, and the importance of properly reporting their outcomes is vital to the continued advancement of nursing science.

Many interventions, practices, and processes exist in the nursing field that are grounded in evidence; however, problems that do not appear to be linked to any strong evidence are encountered in daily practice. Nurses are left questioning, "Why do we do it this way?" or "Is there a better way to provide this intervention?" Sometimes these questions may be answered by performing a literature search and realizing that a novel approach exists to implement into their practice; however, if the literature search does not yield any results for an evidence-based practice change, then conducting research could be the next step. Conducting a large, well-designed study can be overwhelming and expensive and may require funding; it also may not be the appropriate first step in the research process (Morris & Rosenbloom, 2017). A feasibility study may be the appropriate first step to help identify whether a larger research study is warranted.

A feasibility study is often a critical step to be taken prior to conducting a larger study. The primary aim of a feasibility study is to assess the feasibility of conducting future conclusive randomized, controlled trials (RCTs) (Eldridge et al., 2016a). Feasibility studies do not have a primary focus on effectiveness or efficacy (Eldridge et al., 2016a); they can be viewed as a dry run to identify problems that may hinder or prevent success of a subsequent larger trial (Conn, Algase, Rawl, Zerwic, & Wyman, 2010). Feasibility studies can demonstrate that a research design is achievable and that recruitment for an anticipated larger study is possible (Morris & Rosenbloom, 2017). They also can supply data that often are required to receive funding and support for a larger RCT to demonstrate that the study approach is feasible and to make a case that the proposed study will answer the question that is being posed (Morris & Rosenbloom, 2017). They also permit testing of sampling strategies, intervention content, delivery methods, data collection, and analysis (Conn et al., 2010). The article "Nurse-Delivered Symptom Assessment for Individuals With Advanced Lung Cancer" (Flannery et al., 2018) provides an example of how a nurse took a clinical question and moved it into the research arena by conducting a feasibility study to assess an intervention strategy.

A feasibility study's focus is not on efficacy or effectiveness, but the publication of the findings is beneficial and important to the development of science and must follow high standards, just as definitive trials do (Conn et al., 2010; Eldridge et al., 2016a). The Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials (CONSORT) statement, last updated in 2010, is a guideline designed to improve the transparency and quality of the reporting of RCTs (Eldridge et al., 2016a). Eldridge et al. (2016a) presented an extension to that statement for randomized pilot and feasibility trials conducted in advance of a future definitive RCT. The development was motivated by the increasing number of studies that were described as pilot or feasibility studies and by research that identified weaknesses in the way they were being

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