

Evidence-Informed Practice

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INTRODUCTION

The College of Licensed Practical Nurses and Health Care Aides of Alberta (CLHA) has the authority under the *Health Professions Act* (HPA) to carry out its activities and govern Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs)* in a manner that protects and serves the public interest.

Terms found in the definition section are **bolded** where they appear for the first time in this document.

Evidence-informed practice in nursing is the ongoing process that incorporates evidence from research, **clinical expertise**, **client** preferences, and other available resources to guide practice decisions in all practice settings. Applying evidence-informed practice helps LPNs to maintain a holistic and person-centered approach to healthcare, making well-rounded decisions for the best results. This approach is important because it improves client outcomes and enhances care quality, increases efficiency, supports professional growth, builds trust, and minimizes risks.

All LPNs are responsible for adhering to the HPA, regulations, standards of practice, and the code of ethics.

PURPOSE

This practice guideline guides LPNs in evaluating and integrating evidence into their practice. It emphasizes the importance of ethical care, using critical thinking skills, and being aware of client needs, concerns, and preferences.

DISCUSSION OF EVIDENCE

It is important to consider all types of knowledge and different sources of evidence when making clinical decisions. To promote person-centered care, it is best to focus on the client's needs and combine them with research, the healthcare setting, and professional judgment to ensure the best care delivery.

LPNs can practice safe, competent, and ethical care by staying informed about new trends and issues in healthcare and society. They can also facilitate new research that generates valuable

*In this document, "LPN(s)" has the same meaning as "regulated member(s)" in the *Health Professions Act*.

evidence. This evidence can inform LPNs to practice ethically, guiding their judgement and decision-making.ⁱ

Evidence-Informed Practice

The Canadian Council of Practical Nurse Regulators (CCPNR) defines evidence-informed practice as “the ongoing process that incorporates evidence from research, clinical expertise, client preferences, and other available resources to guide practice decisions.”ⁱⁱ According to the *Standards of Practice for Licensed Practical Nurses in Canada*, LPNs must maintain evidence-informed knowledge to support critical thinking and professional judgment. LPNs are expected to utilize this knowledge by incorporating critical thinking, **critical inquiry**, and research to build an evidence-informed practice into all aspects of the nursing process, from assessment to evaluation.

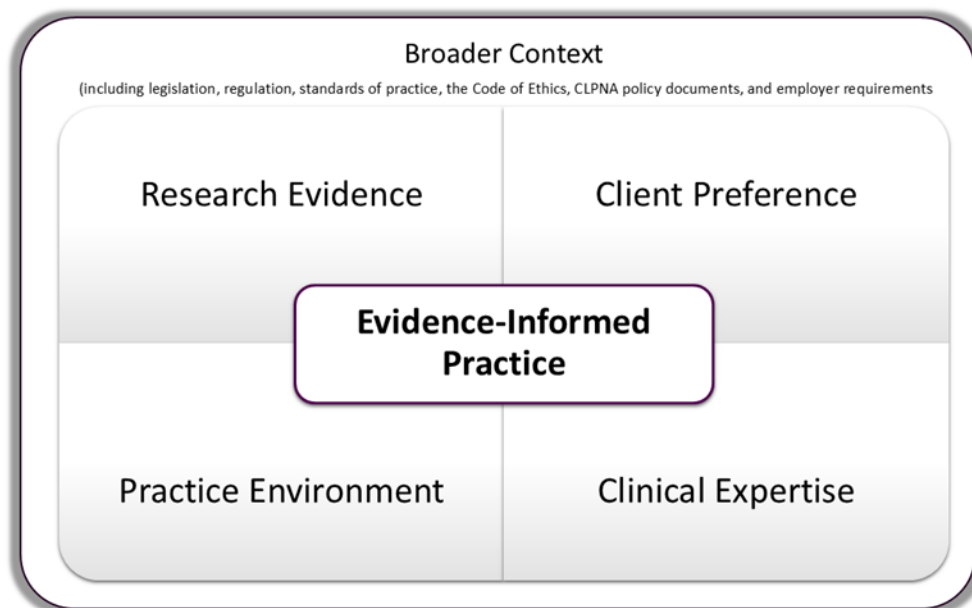


Figure 1 Evidence-Informed Practice

Research Evidence

Research evidence provides information, data, or findings gathered from a systematic investigation and scientific methods that help build an understanding in making informed decisions in healthcare settings. Research evidence comes from various sources, which can include:

- research studies published in **peer-reviewed** journals, which are considered strong evidence because they are checked for reliability and validity.ⁱⁱⁱ

- a **systematic review** on a specific topic that evaluates and combines available evidence and is peer-reviewed.
- grey literature includes evidence from non-traditional sources such as reports, online posts, or unpublished notes. It is not as reliable and has not been peer-reviewed.^{iv}

Healthcare Environmental Context

The healthcare environmental context includes the care setting, staffing, equipment, resources, and other characteristics of the physical setting where healthcare services are provided. It is important for LPNs to understand how the healthcare environment can influence their decisions when implementing and practicing evidence-informed care.

Client Preferences

Person-centered care in evidence-informed practice means using the best research and clinical skills while considering the client's preferences and desired outcomes to provide personalized and effective care.^v According to the Code of Ethics, LPNs provide safe and competent care by maintaining respectful interactions with clients and supporting client choices. Decisions are made collaboratively with the client when possible. This fosters a shared understanding of client preferences and nursing practice, leading to improved evidence-informed practice.^{vi}

Clinical Expertise

Clinical expertise combines several key factors. It includes assessing clients, understanding the settings where care is provided, and considering the client's preferences. It also relies on research evidence and the available healthcare resources.^{vii}

LPNs use clinical expertise to make decisions in their practice based on multiple factors:

- education,
- training,
- previous experiences or knowledge,
- advice from other healthcare professionals, and
- client values and preferences.

INFORMED PRACTICE

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is an active and purposeful problem-solving process that involves identifying and prioritizing risks and problems. It includes clarifying and challenging assumptions, using an organized approach to assessment, checking for accuracy and reliability of information, weighing evidence, recognizing inconsistencies, evaluating conclusions, and adapting thinking.

Critical thinking is also the ability to assess, analyze, and evaluate information carefully to make a well-informed decision. It involves skills like reasoning, understanding, and combining information. Critical thinking helps solve problems by synthesizing multiple factors, including facts and evidence, to guide decisions.

An example of demonstrating critical thinking is an LPN who is caring for a client with chronic pain. The LPN reviews recent research findings that suggest a combination of physical therapy and a new medication could be effective. The LPN discusses these findings with the client and the most responsible health practitioner, considering the client's preferences and willingness to try new approaches. This approach shows how the LPN integrates research by understanding the client's needs and combining this information to create a personalized care plan.

Here are some strategies to help LPNs continuously develop and apply critical thinking skills into their practice.

The Five "A's" of Evidence-Informed Practice^{viii}

Step 1: Ask

- Identify the issue and consider different ways to address it.

Step 2: Acquire

- Search for the best available sources to help answer the problem or situation.
- Check the accuracy by comparing it with other trusted sources.

Step 3: Appraise

- Critically evaluate the sources for reliability, biases, and applicability.
- Review new information carefully, even if it differs from your existing beliefs.
- Be aware of your own unconscious biases.

Step 4: Apply

- Ensure your decisions are based on evidence, best practices, clinical expertise, and client preferences.
- Decide on the best course of action and implement it according to employer requirements.

Step 5: Assess

- Reflect and evaluate the actions taken and if the desired outcome was achieved.
- Identify gaps in knowledge and seek new information to improve future practice.

Integration of Evidence into Practice

LPNs can make informed decisions and develop or modify the plan of care based on their competence, environmental support, client needs, and input from the most responsible health practitioner and/or the broader healthcare team (if applicable). Applying evidence into practice promotes quality, person-centered care. An example of how an LPN can apply evidence into practice is during chronic wound care management of a diabetic client. The LPN performed research that showed that a certain dressing and cleaning method can improve healing. The LPN examines the evidence, thinks about what has worked or not worked during their clinical experiences, and discusses the options with the client, taking into consideration the client's

preferences. The LPN chooses a specific dressing and cleaning method using this new information. This approach is based on evidence, proven effective, and is suited to the client's needs.

Ethical Practice

One key component of evidence-informed practice is assessing and evaluating the ethical aspects of the situation. Different parts of evidence-informed practice may suggest conflicting actions. When this happens, LPNs must use critical thinking, take action in the best interests of the client, and ensure compliance with the code of ethics.

Code of Ethics for Licensed Practical Nurses

2.3 Use evidence, knowledge, and professional judgement to guide nursing decisions.
2.10 Apply new knowledge, technologies, and scientific advances to promote safety, client satisfaction, and well-being.

Collaborative Practice

LPNs must collaborate with other health professionals to benefit clients and the healthcare system. When working in a team, LPNs must understand the roles and responsibilities of all team members and respect and acknowledge their team members' contributions. LPNs should also engage in respectful communication, actively listen, facilitate discussions, offer support, and participate in shared decision-making to enhance client care and safety outcomes.

Building on the wound care example above, the LPN suggests adding physiotherapy and occupational therapy in the community to the client's treatment plan to help increase blood flow to the wound bed and improve healing. The healthcare team also discusses the importance of providing care close to the client's home for easier access. As a result, a social worker is also involved to assist with transportation needs. By collaborating and working together, the healthcare team ensures the client's overall health and recovery are positively impacted, resulting in a more effective treatment plan.

CONCLUSION

Applying evidence-informed practice in nursing involves integrating research, client preferences, clinical expertise, and healthcare environment considerations to maintain a holistic and person-centered approach. LPNs are accountable for the decisions they make in delivering optimal care. Evidence-informed practice always incorporates ethical considerations and critical thinking into all steps of the nursing process.

Documents are updated frequently. For the most current version and access to related documents and resources, please visit the Knowledge Hub on clha.com.

If after reading this document you have questions about its content, please contact the CLHA Professional Practice Team via practice@clha.com, or by phone at 780-484-8886 or 1-800-661-5877 (toll free in Alberta).

DEFINITIONS

Client: an individual who receives a professional service from an LPN. The term client is interchangeable with patient and resident, depending on the work setting.

Clinical expertise: refers to the skills, knowledge, and experience that healthcare professionals develop over time to effectively assess and manage client care.

Critical inquiry: refers to a process of deliberate thinking and reflective reasoning whereby practitioners examine ideas, assumptions, principles, conclusions, beliefs, and actions in the context of nursing practice.^{ix}

Evidence-informed: an action, decision, or process based on the most up-to-date research and knowledge rather than traditional methods, advice from colleagues, or personal beliefs.^x

Peer-review: to read, check, and give your opinion about something that has been written by another scientist or expert working in the same subject area as you.

Systematic review: means gathering and combining all existing research on a specific topic to give a complete picture and ensure that the findings can be easily understood and repeated.

REFERENCES

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