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Challenging times call for enhanced research engagement

In my last editorial just over a year ago I wrote about the importance of nurses engaging with research. There remain many aspects of healthcare where we lack evidence to support the best course of action. However, over the last year we have continued to be bombarded by challenges to health and care settings. We are currently facing challenges to providing healthcare even where there are evidenced based guidelines in place.

Inadequate staffing levels are known to have implications for care provision (Royal College of Nursing, 2017). There is no easy fix for this particular challenge. Stroke services have a lack of staff to deliver services (Hart et al.2019; King's College London, 2021) and they are not alone. The NHS Long Term Plan (NHS, 2019) identifies the need to build staff numbers and the skill mix necessary to support pathways. The blurring of professional boundaries might be needed (CordisBright, 2018) however this should be to support best practice not as a fix for systemic understaffing.

Other challenges include shortages of medicines and blood products. These are becoming an increasingly frequent issue that can hinder healthcare current and future. Blood shortages can challenge the delivery of elective surgeries and other interventions. Shortages of drugs such as Tenecteplase could slow research into alternative and potentially preferential methods of thrombolysis.

With the lingering threat and impact of COVID and the increasing issues with staffing and spiralling health and social care costs we need research more than ever. We need to apply the best evidence where available and we need to explore the most efficient and effective ways to deliver treatments and care interventions. We will continue to face challenging times, so we need answers to the questions about what the best available options are. We need to embrace applied health research as it not only provides new and effective interventions and technologies but also a better understanding of events. It can support the development of evidence-based recommendations and help us understand how best to translate interventions, knowledge and recommendations into everyday practice. If we want to make a real difference to patients, staff, healthcare systems and society then applied health research provides an avenue into a hopefully less challenging future

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