

Advancing Practice

Ambulatory Care Nursing

Research Priorities: Initial Findings of an AAACN National Study

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on behalf of the AAACN Research Committee

Ambulatory care nursing is a broad specialty with roots in public health nursing. The specialty has grown considerably and diversified to keep pace with the ambulatory settings where people need nursing care. Ambulatory care services utilization has increased since the COVID-19 pandemic (Mafi et al., 2022). However, the research and scientific literature of ambulatory care has not kept pace with its burgeoning growth. The AAACN Board of Directors identified the critical need to expand the body of knowledge to guide ambulatory nursing practice, education, and administration. In 2022, AAACN hired its first nurse scientist, and a research committee was soon formed to help build the research agenda to deepen our unique body of science.

Specific Aims

Three specific aims guided this research:

- 1) Identify top research priorities for ambulatory care nursing as a specialty.
- 2) Explore top research priorities for ambulatory care nursing by nursing role and practice environment.
- 3) Identify the self-perceived research and evidence-based practice (EBP) competencies and learning needs of ambulatory care nurses.

This article will provide an overview of findings for the first aim. Results for the other aims will be disseminated in full research manuscripts for publication consideration.

Methods

A cross-sectional survey design was used to garner the perspectives of ambulatory care nurses on topics in our specialty in need of more research. In the first survey, a snowball sample of 119 ambulatory care nurse leaders and experts were asked to complete an initial survey. In this survey, respondents rated the importance of 15 topics on a 4-point Likert scale from *not important* (1) to *extremely important* (4). These topics were derived from a large scoping review of ambulatory care nursing research conducted by the AAACN Research Committee. Experts also were asked to identify other important topics in an open-ended item. These responses were collated with content analysis, and new topics were integrated into the second survey. The second survey included 21 topics and was distributed to ambulatory care nurses within and outside of AAACN. Social media and professional networking were used to advertise the survey to ambulatory care nurses who were not members of the organization. There were 2,790 respondents to the second survey who also rated the importance of these topics on a 4-point Likert scale.

Results

The importance ratings of the ambulatory care nursing topics differed across the two samples. As shown in Table 1, the rank of top topics varied slightly between ambulatory care nurse leaders and the larger sample of ambulatory care nurses. Despite these ranking differences, three topics

were found in common: care coordination, chronic conditions, and patient wellness/prevention. Two topics were viewed as more important in each sample. For the experts, these topics included ambulatory care nurse-sensitive indicators and patient-centered care, while the larger second sample believed medication management and workforce development were of top importance.

Discussion

The identification of ambulatory care nursing research priorities provides new strategic direction for AAACN that further supports deepening the nursing science for our specialty. Coupled with the large scoping review whose manuscript also will soon be submitted for publication, this empirical evidence will support researchers and leaders in prioritizing what study questions are most needed to develop new generalizable knowledge for ambulatory care nursing. Practicing clinicians, nurse scientists, and nursing students in master's, DNP,

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Table 1.
Comparison of Top Five Ambulatory Care Nursing
Research Priorities of Two Samples

Study 1 Snowball Sample of Experts (N=119)	Study 2 Broader Ambulatory Nursing Sample (N=2790)
1. Care coordination	1. Patient wellness/prevention
2. Chronic conditions	2. Medication management
3. Patient wellness/prevention	3. Workforce development
4. Ambulatory care nurse-sensitive indicators	4. Chronic conditions
5. Patient-centered care	5. Care coordination

Table 2.
Ambulatory Care Nursing Research Priorities

Topic	Definition	Focus Areas of Interest
Person-Centered Care	An approach to the planning, delivery, and evaluation of health care that is focused on the individual and their particular healthcare needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patient wellness/prevention • Nurse-patient communication • Health literacy interventions • Patient adherence • Patient-reported outcomes • Advance care planning
Telehealth	The use of electronic information and telecommunications technologies, both synchronous and asynchronous, to provide healthcare services remotely, allowing healthcare providers to evaluate, diagnose, treat, educate, and inform patients without an in-person visit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nurse-advice line services • Telephone triage • Remote monitoring
Ambulatory Care Nurse-Sensitive Indicators (NSIs)	Specific process and patient outcome measures that are influenced by nursing care. These measures are used to monitor quality of care, patient safety, and linking outcomes to nurse-delivered care in ambulatory care settings.	Refer to AAACN NSI Report (www.aaacn.org/nurse-sensitive-indicator-report).
Specialty Population Health	The health status and outcomes of a population of people with shared characteristics, such as a health diagnosis, geographic location, or healthcare provider.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acute conditions • Women's health • Pediatrics • Pediatric mental health • Adult mental health • Older adults
Workforce Development	Initiatives that prepare nurses to meet current and future healthcare needs of clients and communities served by organizations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-licensure education • Continuing education • Professional development
Leadership	Behaviors used to help people align their collective direction, execute strategic plans, inspire healthcare professionals, and continually renew an organization or professional group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interprofessional communication • Healthy work environments • Burnout • Nurse retention • Organizational policy • Political advocacy

and PhD programs can use this information to guide selection of clinical inquiries to fulfill their degree completion requirements.

The AAACN Research Committee used the importance rankings from this study, along with the results of the scoping review, to create a matrix methodology of ambulatory care topics most in need of further research. This methodology involved weighting the importance ratings with the prevalence of studies for each topic found in the scoping review. In this matrix, ambulatory care nursing topics with less research received a higher weight as additional science is more needed in those areas. As a result, the top priorities advertised in the new grants program (see Table 2) approved by the Board of Directors for 2025 differ slightly from the top priorities identified in the study (see Table 1).

AAACN is invested in building the science of ambulatory care nursing. The new grants program offers members the opportunity to gain funding to help them achieve their research goals. The Research Committee has also been meeting with members one-on-one to provide consultations to help support nurses as they gain new mastery in grant writing, research, and dissemination of findings. Additional resources include developing a grant webinar to help guide researchers in best practices in grant writing, adding research content to the *Core Curriculum for Ambulatory Care Nursing*, and developing more professional development activities for our members.

The AAACN grants program will support a total of \$30,000 and \$7,500 for research and EBP/quality improvement initiatives, respectively. While the research question and clinical problem must be the main driver of the methods in the grant proposal, preference will be given to study proposals that use rigorous quantitative or mixed methods, as the ambulatory care nurs-

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opinions, and buy-in from stakeholders responsible for executing, and do your best to get people started. Once implemented, be receptive toward feedback but stay focused on the big picture. Do not make promises you cannot keep. Keep your vision on accomplishing what is best for the system while being transparent. These strategies are critical for adapting to fluid situations and leading through change.

Ideal leaders in community health centers are people who can think outside the box. They create goals ranging from improving daily workflows to 5-year plans for their departments. They can take a zoomed-out view of the current state and think about what needs to be done to reach their goals. They need to be innovative and adaptive, meaning they can pivot their approaches to keep up with the ever-changing requirements of a community health center's operations. They are open to change, aware of the community's needs, and adapt accordingly.

Leadership training programs focused on the community health center environment are effective in building leadership capacity and giving middle managers a chance to expand their skills for their organization's benefit. We have seen leaders who completed such programs experience career growth and implement innovations to improve patient care. Leadership training can be a powerful tool to help ambulatory care nurses advance their careers while continuing to support underserved communities.

Community health centers need strong and effective leaders who approach change and challenges with a positive mindset. Our experience attending the Mass League and Suffolk University certificate program provides an example of the benefits of leadership training for community health center leaders. This program created a positive community for developing emerging leaders in recognition that, at the end of the day, all our community health centers work to serve the same purpose – providing the best care for our patients. ●

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ViewPoint Changes for 2025

Elizabeth Fritz

As we look ahead to 2025, I am excited to announce some changes for *ViewPoint*. To align with the new *Journal of Ambulatory Care Nursing* which launches early next year, *ViewPoint* will transition to a quarterly, online-only publication. In addition to offering our usual selection of three columns and a full-length peer reviewed nursing continuing professional development article, we will have space to add occasional special features or other content.

Another change will be the retirement of the column AAACN Working for You. This column will be replaced with a new column on Diverse Roles in Ambulatory Care Nursing. We look forward to featuring content written by and about ambulatory care nurses in a variety of roles.

Finally, starting in 2025, readers will have an opportunity to win a free session in the AAACN Online Library. Look for instructions to participate in this new reader engagement activity in our first issue of 2025.

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ing body of literature contains significant amounts of qualitative and descriptive work. In addition to describing how their proposed initiative aligns with at least one ambulatory care nursing topic, applicants are required to address how it aligns with the AAACN strategic plan. These elements include *building the science to achieve value and demonstration of health; expanding expertise and empowering excellence; and shaping care, leading through expertise and advocacy for transformation of health to people and communities*.

Conclusion

This study engaged nearly 3,000 ambulatory care nurses to identify the importance of key ambulatory care nursing topics in need of further study. These findings, along with the large scoping review, will provide the framework and platform for building the knowledge base of ambulatory care nursing for the future of our specialty. ●

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