Perceptions and self-perceived knowledge of evidence-based health care amongst registered nurses and midwives in rural areas of the Western Cape.

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Background: Evidence-based health care is a problem-solving approach that integrates the best research evidence with clinician expertise and patient preferences and values. Delivering evidence-based health care, in the context of a caring and supportive organizational culture, results in high-quality care and optimal patient outcomes. It is important that registered nurses know the steps involved in making evidence-informed decisions in a healthcare environment. Currently, there is no published study that assesses practicing registered nurses' understanding, perception and self-perceived knowledge of evidence-based health care in the South African context.

Aim: To describe registered nurses and midwives' perceptions and self-perceived knowledge of evidence-based health care Population: Registered nurses and midwives working in rural hospitals or clinics in the Cape Winelands district, Western Cape, South Africa. Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted, using a validated paper-based questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised of two sections. The first section consisted of questions related to registered nurses and midwives' demographical data, educational level and understanding of evidence-based health care. The second section assessed their evidence-based health care attitude and behaviour. Lastly, the barriers to and suggestions for improvement of practicing evidence-based health care were explored.

Results: Overall, the response rate was 52% (125/240). Most registered nurses and midwives reported that they had heard about the term evidence-based health care as part of their post-basic studies. Registered nurses and midwives were confident in their ability to perform the steps of evidence-based health care and mostly had a positive attitude towards it, although they reported that they did not engage in the steps of evidence-based health care on a regular basis. Identified barriers included resistance to change amongst older nurses, lack of evidence-based health care knowledge and lack of role models. Suggestions to improve the practice of evidence-based health care focused on training all nurses through in-service training, attending of conferences and other courses.

Conclusion: Registered nurses and midwives lacked evidence-based health care knowledge and skills, and they did not engage in evidence-based health care on a regular basis. There is a need to improve training in evidence-based health care for all registered nurses and midwives. Strategies to increase evidence-informed decision-making should include all healthcare professionals at all levels – managers, doctors and other members of the multidisciplinary team.