

CLINICAL SIGNIFICANCE AND DNP PROJECTS

Many nurses are seeking additional education on evidence-based practice at all levels. Those who earn the DNP degree have attained the highest level of educational preparation for advanced practice other than a PhD, which means that in addition to evidence-based care, focus is placed on translating and implementing evidence into practice (AACN, 2015). Evidence-based practice is a deliberate problem-solving approach to clinical practice that integrates the best scientific evidence, clinician expertise and opinion, and patient perspectives in making decisions about patient care (Ball, Sackett, Phillips, Straus, & Haynes, 2002). A DNP project should aim to produce clinically significant outcomes that contribute to evidence-based practice. Clinical significance is an indicator of patient change and is from the perspective of the patient, with patient self-assessment being a central indicator of clinical significance (Bruner, Corbett, Gates, & Dupler, 2012). Clinical significance supports evidence-based practice. When looking at the triadic definition of evidence-based practice, connections can be made between best scientific evidence and statistical significance, clinician expertise and practical significance, and perspectives of patients and clinical significance. The important point is that DNP projects that emphasize clinical significance can contribute to evidence-based practice.

A major goal for a DNP project is for the student to demonstrate the ability to lead and practice at the highest level, using research and evidence to improve patient care, either directly or indirectly. The focus is on improved patient outcomes rather than to the contribution to generalizable knowledge. These points are supported by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN): Clinical significance guides practice and differs from statistical significance used in research (See Table 1).

Table 1

Brief descriptions of types of significance

Significance type	Description	Questions asked of the findings
Statistical	Results due to chance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Were the results of the intervention due to chance?• What is the probability that these results occurred by chance alone?
Practical	Quantifies the impact of a treatment. Estimates the magnitude of effect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How effective was the intervention/treatment?• How much change does the intervention/treatment cause?
Clinical	The practical or applied importance of effect, and does it make a difference to clients/ subjects/patients in everyday life	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Was the intervention/treatment effective enough to improve the patient's experience (e.g., of their health or provision of care)?• Was the intervention/treatment enough to improve or eliminate a diagnostic criterion for a condition?

References

- American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) The Doctor of Nursing Practice: Current issues and clarifying recommendations. Report from the task force on the implementation of the DNP. 2015. Accessed July 10, 2021. <http://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/42/DNP/DNP-Implementation.pdf?ver=2017-08-01-105830-517>
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- Bruner S, Corbett C, Gates B, Dupler A. Clinical significance as it relates to evidence-based practice. *Int J Nurs.* 2012;23(2):62-74. doi:10.1111/j.2047-3095.2012.01205.x
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