PRACTITIONER’S GUIDE TO USING RESEARCH FOR EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE

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Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey.
Published simultaneously in Canada.

Wiley Bicentennial Logo: Richard J. Pacifico

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Rubin, Allen.
Practitioner’s guide to using research for evidence-based practice / by Alan Rubin.
p. : cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
RC337.R73 2008
616.89’140072—dc22
2007013693

Printed in the United States of America.
To human service practitioners whose compassion and professionalism spur them to persevere, despite limited support, to seek and critically appraise research evidence so that they can maximize the chances that their efforts will be effective in helping people in need.
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Helping professionals these days are hearing a great deal about evidence-based practice (EBP) and are experiencing increasing pressure to engage in it. In fact, EBP has become part of the definition of ethical practice.

Accompanying the growth in the popularity of EBP in the human services field is a growing concern about how rarely practitioners engage in the EBP process. Various pragmatic factors have been cited regarding this concern, such as time constraints and lack of agency access to bibliographic databases. Another factor is that practitioners typically do not retain the research knowledge that they learned as students. Many practitioners, therefore, are likely to feel unable to implement the EBP process because they feel incapable of appraising accurately the quality of research studies.

There are various reasons why practitioners may not retain the research knowledge that they learned as a student. One is simply the passage of time. Exacerbating that factor is that in their early careers they are unlikely to experience expectations from superiors that they use the research knowledge they gained in school. Another factor is the way that research courses may have been taught. Typically, the emphasis in teaching research has been more on how to do research in the role of researcher than on appraising and using research in the role of a practitioner who is engaged in EBP. Little wonder, then, that so many students who aspire to be service providers—and not researchers—lack enthusiasm for their research courses and soon forget much of what they learned in them.

Consequently, when service providers attempt to heed the call to engage in EBP by finding and appraising research studies, practitioners are likely to experience difficulty in differentiating between those studies that contain reasonable limitations and those that contain fatal flaws. That is, they are likely to feel unable to judge whether a study’s limitations merely imply regarding the study with some caution or disregarding it as too egregiously flawed to be worthy of guiding their practice. Lacking confidence in this judgment, it’s easy for practitioners to feel discouraged about engaging in EBP.

This book attempts to alleviate that problem. Rather than discussing research from the standpoint of preparing to do research, it provides a practitioner-oriented guide to appraising and using research as part of the