Problem:
With the growing emphasis on evidence-based practice in improving patient outcomes and nursing practice, it is imperative that nurses actively embrace research as a viable part of professional practice.

Evidence:
Clinton Thiel and other research educators addressed the need for nurses to acquire research skills. Thiel advocated 'learning by doing' while conducting The Great American Cookie Experiment (GACE).

Strategy:
Thiel's innovative, non-threatening GACE strategy was incorporated into the nursing research program of a large healthcare system. GACE re-introduces practicing nurses to the research process. Classroom lectures are combined with implementation of a research effort: the study of nursing staff’s cookie preference. Participants (2008, n=40; 2009, n=55) learned basic research principles involved in protocol development like determining sample size and obtaining informed consent.

Practice Change:
Nurse-researchers conducted the study in two inpatient and ten outpatient settings. Nursing staff (2008, n=449; 2009, n = 422) were recruited to taste two kinds of cookies and evaluate them using The Cookie Assessment Tool.

Evaluation:
Research students viewed results of cookie test and identified positive and challenging aspects of the implementation. Location and age of responders were among variables used to identify possible differences in response.

Results:
The GACE program provided a first time for a number of the nurses to actively participate in a research project. The project’s scope allowed participants to learn, develop a study protocol, and actively engage in research. Staff members had opportunities to experience being recruited as study participants and learned the research informed consent process.

Recommendations:
Applying fun activities to provide opportunities for hands-on experience with the research process can engage nurses' interest in learning about the role of research in evidence based practice.

Lessons Learned:
Research principles learned while conducting the cookie experiment can be applied to address clinical practice topics. Two graduates have used their gained knowledge and experience to develop and submit research protocols.

Bibliography:

Hudson-Barr D., Weeks, S., Watters, C. (2002). Introducing the staff nurse to nursing research through the great American cookie experiment. JONA, 32 (9), 440-443.
