

From Questions to Action: Reflecting on a Research Journey with Ekam Foundation

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This year, as [Ekam Foundation Mumbai](#) prepares to roll out its upskilling intervention for early-career nurses, I find myself thinking back to the research project with which this journey started three years ago.

At the time, I was a Research Manager at [Purple Audacity](#) – a research consultancy based in Delhi, and had the opportunity to lead a pro bono study through [MRSI's *The Community Project*](#).

The story began with a challenge that Ekam had been grappling with through years of work in the healthcare sector. Nurses are often the people patients see most – they are present during routine check-ups, medical emergencies, moments of recovery and moments of uncertainty. Despite the critical role they play in healthcare delivery, opportunities for their continued learning are surprisingly limited once formal education ends. With this in mind, Ekam was exploring the possibility of designing a skill development programme.

But before building a solution, they wanted to better understand the problem: What kinds of skilling needs existed? Were nurses, and other healthcare support staff, interested in continued learning opportunities? What would make an intervention genuinely useful in the realities of their day-to-day work? These were the questions that brought us together.

Working closely with the Ekam team, I designed a qualitative study to better understand the experiences, aspirations, and professional development needs of nurses and healthcare support staff across diverse healthcare settings in India.

What we found was far more interesting than answering our question on whether a skill gap exists or not. The nurses we spoke to were not waiting for someone to teach them - they were already teaching themselves. Many described learning through observation, guidance from colleagues, conversations with supervisors, online resources, and everyday problem-solving on the job. Several spoke about turning to Google or YouTube to better understand unfamiliar equipment or procedures. Behind these stories was something deeply encouraging: a willingness to learn, a recognition of their own growth areas, and an aspiration for career progression. **The challenge they faced was not motivation, but access.** This insight shifted our perspective on the entire project – the aim was no longer about addressing deficiencies, it was recognising ambition and creating pathways to support it.

As the study progressed, several other themes began to emerge. The first is related to soft skills. Participants spoke not only about communicating with patients, but also about engaging with families who were often navigating fear, uncertainty, and difficult decisions. It was a reminder that nursing is not only a technical profession; it is a profoundly human one.

The second one was technical skills. Nurses spoke about wanting greater confidence in using medical equipment and understanding specialised procedures – so they can support doctors better. Healthcare is constantly evolving, and many participants felt that the learning opportunities available to them had not always kept pace with those changes.

More importantly, there was no single learning journey. The needs of an early-career nurse differed from those of a senior nurse. Nurses working in specialised departments faced different challenges from those in general care settings. Geography mattered, and so did institutional context. A one-size-fits-all approach was unlikely to meet the diverse realities we encountered through the research.

What the study ultimately provided was a validation of the need gap that Ekam had long observed through its work on the ground. It identified priority areas for support, and highlighted the importance of tailoring learning opportunities to different contexts and career stages. Most importantly, it provided evidence that nurses were not only willing to learn – they were actively looking for opportunities to do so.

The research project went on to receive runner-up recognition at the MRSI Community Project Challenge 2023, an achievement I remain proud of. Yet when I think about the project today, the recognition feels secondary.

Three years ago, we were trying to understand what nurses needed to thrive in their roles. Today, those insights have helped inform an intervention designed around those very realities. This, in my opinion, is the **true power and objective of research – its translation to action**. The study offered evidence, direction, and a stronger understanding of where support could create the greatest value. The vision, commitment, and persistence required to transform those insights into action belong entirely to the team at Ekam. I congratulate the entire team at Ekam Foundation on reaching this milestone, and look forward to watching the next chapter unfold.

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