

Qualitative Research and Research Methods Training Course University of Warwick 2nd-3rd July 2015

A number of ICPV and KSS Cancer Partnership Research Group (CPRG) members were privileged to attend a training course for the Mammo-50 study at the University of Warwick, organised for us by Professor Janet Dunn and led by Professor Gillian Hundt and Dr Clara Jørgensen. The course was both an introduction to qualitative research and its methods and practical work in peer interviewing and facilitating focus groups. It was held at the University of Warwick conference centre which provided us with top-class accommodation and food over the two day course.

We began after lunch on Thursday, meeting in a seminar room in the Warwick Clinical Trials Unit. Gillian and Clara led us through an overview of qualitative methods, learning about the differences between deductive and inductive research, and learning that qualitative research usually takes an inductive approach i.e. using findings from the research project to identify implications for theory. Qualitative data comes in the form of words, narratives, interpretations etc.

We moved on to gain an understanding of the different types of qualitative methods: ethnography, participant observation, unstructured or semi-structured interviews, focus groups, participatory methods or document analysis. We then discussed some strengths of the qualitative method, such as including unexpected findings, gaining an insider view of the field, but also some limitations, such as reliability, difficulty in making generalisations, and being time consuming.

After looking in a little more detail at all the methods, we homed in on the qualitative interviews and focus groups which were the most relevant to our involvement. We considered how to decide the membership of groups and who to interview in order to meet one's research goals. We considered random recruitment, snowballing (the practice of using initial participants to recruit others) or the use of pre-existing groups. Also we were asked to consider whether groups should be homogenous (facilitating communication, but may result in groupthink) or heterogeneous (inspiring new ideas about topics but more risk of lack of respect for opinions).

After some discussion about facilitation and moderation skills, we moved on to a talk about research ethics, noting that ethical issues can be more pronounced in qualitative research as topics can often be sensitive, there is prolonged contact with researchers, and the subjectivity

of the researcher may play a role. A suggested exercise was to consider the ethical issues and how to address them in each stage of one's research project from design, to data collection, to analysis and dissemination.

The second day of our training began bright and early as we worked on designing a topic guide for semi-structured interviews for the Mammo-50 study. This is a sort of crib sheet of questions to help a peer interviewer guide the interview through the topic to be discussed. By working on this in advance it can ensure that all interviewers are working to the same guide, and help the interviewer ensure that they ask open questions. In our case in groups we each took a small part of the topic and constructed an initial open question, followed by several follow-on questions.

We went on in pairs to practise interviewing using the topic guides we had produced. We did this with varying degrees of success. I think one of the areas we found most difficult was to ensure that we didn't ask leading questions. It was relatively easy to spot when we lapsed into leading questions, but very much more difficult to frame non-leading questions on the fly.

Finally the day ended with a practice focus group on cancer follow-up. Two people were chosen to be facilitator and scribe, and the rest were handed roles to play in the group such as 'refuses to speak' or 'dominant but often off-topic'. We attacked our roles with gusto making control of the group very hard for the poor facilitator, but it illustrated the range of people and views that may well be present at a focus group. In contrast Gillian, one of our course leaders, then acted as facilitator to our group as we discussed our views on follow-up, so that we could see how an experienced facilitator might work.

All in all it was an excellent couple of days and we would like to thank Gillian Hundt and Clara Jørgensen for all the hard work in preparing and presenting it for us, and to thank Janet Dunn and the Mammo-50 team for making it all possible.

Hilary Stobart - ICPV member
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