

## Training Medical Teachers in Using Qualitative Research Methods

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Studies addressing medical education have rarely used qualitative research methods to contribute knowledge about the phenomenon under investigation. There are two possible reasons for this. First, in the past, the qualitative works were rejected due to a lack of objective evidence, considered to be “unscientific” and “anecdotal.”<sup>1</sup> Second, medical educators have failed to communicate the methods, canons and utilization of qualitative inquiry approaches to professional colleagues or undergraduate medical students.<sup>2,3</sup> It seems that the latter point is most pertinent here. In Iran, there are few studies which are grounded in qualitative research methods, and doctors tend to scrutinize quantitative research designs in order to glean empirical data, which is rooted in objective reality.

This may be attributed to the fact that medical schools in Iran equip doctors with the skills to analyze epidemiologic studies. Based upon such arguments, Tehran Medical Education Development Centre with cooperation from the Ministry of Health and Medical Education organized a workshop to introduce qualitative research methods in medical education. The purpose of this workshop was to bring the attention of faculty members to qualitative research methods in medical education, and its application to their own area of interest. The participants were the academic staff members of the TUMS (Tehran University of Medical Sciences) with a range of academic ranking, from assistant professor to full professor and different medical specialties. Sixteen academic staff attended the workshop. The faculty training workshop was held during 6 consecutive days, from 8:30 till 17.00. The first half day of the workshop consisted of an assessment of the faculty members' qualitative research knowledge and skills. The group discussions revealed that the participants had poor knowledge of qualitative research methods and most of the participants had a positivistic approach toward research methodology. The assumptions of quantitative methods were more tangible and understandable to participants than qualitative traditions. During the workshop, a few participants discussed how to rely on narrative information with small sample sizes in order to obtain evidence. Many participants argued that such approaches are practical for conceptualizing social problems rather than clinical issues. However, they tried to link the application of such methods to their own areas of interest as part of their daily. On the last day of the workshop, I realized that many participants had positive attitudes towards such qualitative research methods. This

suggested that the major goals of the training workshop were accomplished, that is, the trainees showed knowledge of qualitative research methods during group discussions and acquisition of skills in conducting these methods on the Nominal Group Technique (NGT). However, the NGT findings highlighted the need for additional emphasis on analyzing qualitative data, particularly the grounded theory approach.

### References

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