

Thursday 11 March 2010

16:30-17:30

Innovative Research Methods: using observation in a palliative care context

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Qualitative research using observation as a data collection method is rarely used in palliative care research. However observational work has particular strengths as it enables privileged insights into situations under study, facilitates gaining trust and cooperation of participants and permits a more direct method of data collection compared to interviews. Observation can be a very powerful tool in providing evidence that has a direct influence on clinical practice.

In this workshop we will explore reasons for using observational methods in palliative care research, give examples of when observational methods would be appropriate, and discuss roles in observational research. We will enable the translation of this theoretical work into practice through a discussion of the practical issues of using observational work in palliative care research. This is based on our recent and ongoing experiences of using observations to understand the work of district nurses in palliative care across two separate studies.

Issues that we will debate in this workshop include:

- Presenting observational work for research ethics committee approval, gate-keeping, and negotiating access to observational sites.
- Obtaining and maintaining consent from different participants, and addressing this in longitudinal observational research.
- Accessing observational opportunities and issues of availability and flexibility.
- Recording observational data.
- Practical issues such as positioning yourself as an observer in the setting, and responding to issues that arise during the observation.
- Discussing enacting different observational roles in practice, and how our professional backgrounds affect these roles.
- Integrating observational data with other study data such as interviews.
- Analytical issues such as approach to analysis, triangulation, rigour and the interpretation of observations.

By the conclusion of the workshop participants should have a greater understanding of when and how to use observational methods, and an appreciation of the practical issues in conducting such research.

Catherine Walshe is a RCUK Research Fellow/Lecturer at School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work at the University of Manchester. She has a clinical background in nursing, particularly community nursing.

Catherine's research interests reflect this clinical background, and her studies explore issues of primary palliative care. She is currently engaged in a series of studies funded by a 5 year RCUK post-doctoral fellowship exploring the role of district nurses in providing palliative care to patients at home.

Catherine contributes to the work of the Cancer Experiences Collaborative, is on the executive committee of the Palliative Care Research Society and the editorial board of the journal 'Palliative Medicine'.

Gail Ewing is a Senior Research Associate at the Centre for Family Research, University of Cambridge. In the last twelve years she has worked on research in palliative care. These include studies on symptoms and needs of palliative patients in primary care, circumstances surrounding death at home and the effects on family caregivers in bereavement, early support visits provided by district nurses to palliative patients at home and perspectives of palliative care in an acute hospital setting.

In the last two years Gail has been working with Dr Gunn Grande, Professor Sheila Payne and the National Forum for Hospice at Home on a follow up of their earlier work with family carers to identify key components of carer support and to develop and test a carers' support needs assessment tool for use in practice.

Gail was a member of the Help the Hospices Working Group on Carer Assessment. She is also a member the EAPC Task Force on Family Carers.