

Qualitative Research: the Springboard of Scientific Investigation

“To boldly go where no man has gone before” is the iconic opening line and first episode of the legendary science fiction television series “Star Trek.”¹ This captures the pioneering spirit of investigation embodied by qualitative research. Yet rather than produce science fiction, qualitative research captures scientific reality, albeit at an early stage.

It analyses witnessed phenomena and inquires “why,” then proceeds to discover “how” such exists. The article by Prieto and co-authors on “*Sari-sari* Stores as Community Pharmacies? A Qualitative Exploration of *Sari-sari* Stores Selling Medicines in the Philippines” describes the observed occurrence of this local enterprise and generates interest in deeper investigation.² Such is the function of qualitative research.

From this study, directions for further investigation can point towards nationwide mapping of access to community pharmacies, channeled to investigation of the regulatory landscape of pharmacies, or correlated with disease patterns and emergence of antibiotic resistance.³⁻⁵ It would be interesting to relate and connect this work to a prior study published in the *Acta* on antibiotic misuse.⁶

Nearly 1 of 6 articles in our journal are qualitative studies, including articles which employed mixed methods research. The potential for deeper inquiry is great as qualitative research acts as a veritable springboard. Every response, every insight, every discovery gained from the interview of key informants, from the transcript of focus group discussion, and from the faithful recording of field observations, opens new frontiers, generates new quests, and informs and guides formulation of new methodologies.

Qualitative research provides broad foundations for future policy, innovative intervention, and revolutionary systems design. Such translation requires an infrastructure that utilizes what has been published to open new frontiers and to integrate findings into actionable points. The findings of the study of Paguio and co-authors on “What Matters Most to Students in Simulation-based Education: Voices from Three Philippine State Universities” in this issue are one such example where an understanding gained from this investigation will help the national operationalization of simulation-based education.⁷

Scientists should leverage such bounty derived from qualitative studies to intervention studies of rigorous methodology. Higher-order quantitative investigation can be constructed based on derived knowledge from qualitative studies and likewise provide a context-sensitive framework for policy reform to take off. That structured pathway of progression removes friction, accelerates the process, and makes efficient use of finite resources. The institutionalization of such a pathway is, hopefully, underway.

We hope we will be part of that pathway that will shepherd science from concept to prototype to established intervention, that pathway that humanizes policy to effective implementation, and that pathway that converts observations of the “real world” to improve the quality of “lived realities” for all.

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