

Research in anesthesiology: Time to look beyond quantitative studies

Sir,

Research in anesthesia or as a matter of fact in most disciplines of medicine have always been based on quantitative methodologies rather than qualitative approach.^[1] Qualitative research, in broad terms, is an approach which helps researchers understand people's or patient's experiences in detail using a specific set of research methods such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observations, content analysis, and visual methods.^[2] The specific type of qualitative research method is chosen according to the research question. In health care research, qualitative methods not only help in understanding patient's experiences but they can also be useful in exploring problems in medical care, education and training, understanding human-human interactions, human-machine interactions, and in all providing a holistic comprehension of the interaction between the patient and the healthcare provider.

Anesthesiologists are involved with patient care right from preoperative evaluation until the time the patient is discharged from the hospital. Perioperative evaluation is mostly limited to eliciting history, clinical examination, assessment of biochemical, and radiological reports. However, such approach of evaluation may not be adequate to address the psychosocial issues.^[1] For such issues routine preoperative evaluations coupled with qualitative research methods such as in-depth interview could help bring up a detailed and new understanding of patient's experiences. This is just one instance of what qualitative study approach can provide to the field of anesthesiology.

Qualitative research can address certain research questions which the traditional quantitative research methods cannot, for example, the experience of patients who encountered anesthesia awareness, patients experiencing phantom pain after amputation, etc. Furthermore, such research methods can be used to support or explore possibilities before or after conducting research with quantitative methods. For example, focus group discussion could be employed to identify new research areas or in-depth interviews could be conducted with experts after obtaining results from a quantitative study to explore further research possibilities.^[3,4]

Although qualitative approaches have lately started to be used, such studies are still very scarce in the medical literature.^[5] However, health care researchers have gradually started acknowledging the value of qualitative methods.^[6] It is,

therefore, important that such qualitative research methods also be embraced in the field of anesthesiology as this would definitely help improve the depth and breadth of anesthesia literature.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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