

Писмо уреднику/Letter to the editor

ATTITUDES OF PhD STUDENTS TOWARDS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS IN MEDICINE

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СТАВОВИ СТУДЕНАТА ДОКТОРСКИХ СТУДИЈА ПРЕМА КВАЛИТАТИВНИМ МЕТОДАМА ИСТРАЖИВАЊА У МЕДИЦИНИ

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Примљен/Received: 29.3.2015.

Прихваћен/Accepted: 18.7.2015.

ABSTRACT

Although qualitative research methods are increasingly used in medicine, PhD students in biomedical fields rarely choose these methods for their theses. In a two-session, unstructured meeting of professor and his 2nd year PhD students in the field of medicine the issue of using qualitative research methods for PhD thesis was openly discussed, and notes from the discussion were semantically analyzed. The students all agreed that they would not choose a qualitative research method for their PhD thesis, because they believed that qualitative research is more prone to bias, less reliable than quantitative research and with fewer chances to be accepted by the scientific community. If qualitative research methods are to be more utilized by PhD students of medicine in the future, much should be done on education of PhD students and on promotion of these methods among the academic staff.

Key Words: qualitative research methods; medicine; PhD thesis

САЖЕТАК

Мада се квалитативне методе истраживања све више користе у медицини, студент докторских студија на биомедицинским факултетима се ретко одлучују за такве методе у изради својих теза. На два неструктурирана састанка професора и студената друге године докторских студија из области медицине разговарано је о коришћењу квалитативних метода истраживања у изради докторских дисертација, при чему су забелешке са састанака семантички анализирани. Студенти су се сагласили да не би изабрали квалитативни метод истраживања за своју тезу, јер сматрају да је квалитативно истраживање подложније појави систематске грешке, да је мање поуздано од квантитативног истраживања и да је мања вероватноћа да ће резултате таквог истраживања прихватити научна заједница.

Да би квалитативне методе истраживања студенти докторских студија из области биомедицине више користили у будућности, треба много учинити на додатном образовању студената и на промоцији ових метода међу наставницима и сарадницима.

Кључне речи: квалитативне методе истраживања; медицина; докторска дисертација

Dear Editor,

qualitative research methods are increasingly used in medicine, especially in the area of public health research, although they could be used in any area¹. However, PhD students in biomedical fields rarely choose these methods for their theses^{2,3}. Considering high applicability of qualitative research methods in medicine and relatively low costs, qualitative research is certainly an interesting option for PhD thesis. We were interested to understand views and opinions of the PhD students from the field of medicine considering use of qualitative methods in their future theses in order to explain their relatively low utilization.

The question of using qualitative research methods for PhD thesis was raised during regular classes with 2nd year PhD students at Faculty of Medical Sciences (FMS), University of Kragujevac, Serbia, during the winter semester 2014/15. On two occasions professor put this topic on agenda in a group of 19 students, allowing enough time for open expression of opinions and discussion. The professor acted as a moderator, explaining basics of qualitative research methods in the beginning, putting initial questions, and letting the students fully express what they had on mind. Between the two sessions the students had an opportunity to further explore the issue of qualitative research methods in medicine by themselves. Two students were taking notes from the first session, and after semantic analysis performed by the professor, they presented the main concepts to other students on the second session, when final consensus was made. It should be noted that the students heard only general remarks about qualitative research methods during their study course prior the first session of this discussion.

The students all agreed that they would not choose a qualitative research method for their PhD thesis. The prevailing reasons for such attitude stressed out by the students were: (1) qualitative research is more difficult to conduct,

since it demands deep knowledge of the subject; (2) investigator bias is hard to avoid in qualitative research; (3) belief that statistics which comes with quantitative studies is essential part of any serious research; (4) quantitative research in medicine is more easily accepted by the research community and the university committees; (5) belief that qualitative research does not offer anything more than quantitative research can already achieve. Although with generally negative attitude towards qualitative research, the student expressed interest in this type of research, and generally liked the idea.

The negative attitude of the PhD students towards the qualitative research methods is at least partly consequence of being insufficiently informed about the subject, since the students expressed incorrect statements about scientific invalidity and exclusive bias-proneness of qualitative methods. The PhD study program at FMS did not include special units devoted to qualitative research methods in the past⁴, so the students had only basic formal knowledge about these methods. On the other hand, the students were afraid that research committees of the University would not accept qualitative research proposals because at this university out of 309 PhD theses defended so far in the field of medicine only a few were partially based on qualitative research⁵. It seems that rather focused research culture at the university which in the field of medicine favors quantitative research methods is also responsible for underutilization and lack of extensive formal education in regard to the qualitative research methods.

In order to increase utilization of qualitative research methods in medicine PhD study curricula should include extensive obligatory lessons and practical instructions about qualitative research methods with examples of their successful employment in medical science. Besides, much more should be done on presentation and promotion of these methods to academic staff of medical schools in general, in order to increase their receptivity for new approaches and research ideas which could be investigated only by qualitative methods, or by combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods.

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