BOOK REVIEWS

NVivo 10 [software program]. Version 10. QSR International; 2012.

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Qualitative research within pharmacy education is increasing in popularity. This type of research affords rich description of data, yet quantitatively trained researchers are often uncomfortable with this type of data analysis. NVivo 10, released in 2012 by QSR International, can assist researchers carrying out this type of research by offering easy to use tools for organization and analysis of such data.

Let me answer the question that everyone must be asking themselves: “Is there a magic button I can click to make the program code the data for me?” Unfortunately, NVivo software cannot do all of the work for us. While some automatic coding functions exist within this program, the brain behind the process is yours. What this program does offer is an easy to use format to help you sort, organize, and classify data until you find the answer to the research question you are seeking.

For a complex program, NVivo is very user friendly. The software workspace is fashioned after the Microsoft Office interface, so it will immediately look familiar to users of Outlook, with a panel to the left containing folders and a larger panel to the right containing a project outline above and detailed documents below. The task ribbon permits quick completion of tasks and offers a “wizard” to run queries and create reports.

Qualitative research encourages varied sources of information including interviews, field notes, video recordings, images, documents, press clippings, and photographs.¹ NVivo allows researchers to collect, organize, and analyze these varied data types. Documents can be imported from Microsoft Word (.doc and .docx), Portable Document Format (.pdf), rich text (.rtf), and plain text (.txt) formats. Almost any form of audio, photo, and video files can be imported along with Excel spreadsheets and Access databases. A cool new feature of version 10 supports the use of Web pages, social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter), YouTube, and SurveyMonkey to directly import data. Bibliographic references can even be imported from EndNote, Mendeley, RefWorks, and Zotero to help manage literature reviews. This wide range of data importation makes this software attractive to researchers using various methods of data collection.

Coding data around themes is a key characteristic of qualitative research. NVivo labels these storage containers as “nodes.” Nodes can represent anything that the researcher wants them to be and grants easy organization and reorganization of themes in the data. One of my favorite features is the “drag and drop” function that allows for quick coding of sections of text. You can simply highlight a section of text and move it into a node of your choosing. Highlighting of previously coded pieces reminds you of work you have already completed and supports reflection of your work to monitor emerging themes. You can keep track of your thoughts by creating memos and annotations linked to the data to facilitate insight into your research.

Running analyses or queries with NVivo is actually a fun task. The program offers packaged queries and reports including word search and word frequency options, but new queries can be created with the help of a wizard that walks you through each step of query implementation.

Creating effortless, high-quality pictorial representation of data might be my favorite feature of this software. Researchers can choose to use word clouds and words trees to display frequently appearing words in text and provide surrounding context to the data. Bar, column, and pie charts can be customized to match your style, and cluster analyses can be run to compare and contrast coding patterns. The visual capabilities of this program provide researchers a powerful tool to display their findings. After all, a picture is worth a thousand words.

Logs of all events and changes are tracked which accommodates multiple researcher collaboration within a single NVivo project. Inter-rater reliability can be calculated with the click of a button, which makes this software ideal when comparing coding by multiple researchers. Data are easily exported to Excel, Access, SPSS, and SAS/STAT. Additionally, you can export your project to a Web page to allow viewing by colleagues who do not own the program.

Despite the wonderful features of this software, it is not perfect. The program occasionally crashes when opening a large file but usually opens on the second attempt. Another complaint is the absence of the “save as” feature causing unnecessary creation and renaming of new files. NVivo does not run natively on Mac computers, so a Windows virtualization platform is necessary to run the software on a Mac. Hopefully, newer versions will address these insufficiencies.

I am still learning the many features of this program but find myself using it for more than just qualitative research. Having recently completed a huge analysis of qualitative data, you would think that I would be happy to get away from this program, but I come back to it in the course of my normal working day to help me better organize information.

If you are interested in trying out this software, you can download a free 30-day trial and test the powerful analytics for yourself.² With many tutorial videos, technical support, and frequent webinars, you can always learn more about NVivo at http://www.qsrinternational.com/products_nvivo.aspx. Customer support has always been prompt and friendly even when contacted by a frantic new user. I have been more than satisfied with this product and look forward to completing many more qualitative projects with the help of this software.

REFERENCES

1. Anderson C. Presenting and evaluating qualitative research. *Am J Pharm Educ.* 2010;74(8):Article 141.
2. NVivo 10, QSR International. http://www.qsrinternational.com/products_nvivo.aspx. Accessed January 30, 2014.

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