The immense value of qualitative research to pharmacy

I READ WITH GREAT INTEREST THE RECENT QUALITATIVE investigation of how community pharmacists make decisions by Gregory, Whyte and Austin.¹ I read every word, and I can't remember the last time I did that. It represents exceptional scholarship in the research question, methods, analysis and writing. It advanced my knowledge, stimulated me as a researcher and will influence my teaching and contributions as a member of the undergraduate pharmacy curriculum committee. I'm sure others who read from across the profession also found that it made a strong impression.

CPJ is to be commended for its promotion of qualitative research, a critical but undervalued and sometimes maligned form of scholarly investigation. In contrast to the *BMJ* and the ongoing backlash,² *CPJ* stands as an enthusiastic provider of qualitative research, from which we all benefit.

It seems to me that most criticisms of qualitative research, a form of research more typically associated with the fields of psychology and sociology, come out of ignorance. Qualitative research methods are very different from wet lab and clinical intervention research methods, in which quantitative precision is sought and variance eschewed. Qualitative investigations go where no other research method is capable of going, by examining the totality (ideally) of the why and how. It is necessary for understanding what motivates behaviours, decision-making thought processes and attitudes. Gregory and colleagues' investigation into pharmacists' problem-solving tactics and default decisional techniques when faced with complex, ambiguous, and/or ethically sensitive (and quite likely routine) clinical situations is enlightening and lays the groundwork for follow-up investigations, while sending a strong signal that changes in training and practice expectations are needed.

I am encouraged to see growth in qualitative research related to the profession of pharmacy and in medication use behaviours, and I commend those, including Murphy, Austin, Guirguis, Grindrod and others, who are leading the way.³⁻⁷ We would do well to enhance the profile and utility of qualitative research in pharmacy education and research.

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