

Course title: Qualitative Research Methods for Public Health

Venue: Monash University – School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine

Primary Course Facilitator: Dr Darshini Ayton.

My primary reason for undertaking this course was to support my decision to venture into the world of qualitative research as a component of my PhD. As a decision, this was 'way out of my comfort zone! I was scared by the language and underpinning paradigms of qualitative research; it always felt inaccessible for this reason. However, having taken the step to seek and include this data in my study, it has added considerable depth (not to mention some contradictory findings) to the quantitative data. I am a convert! I am currently at the stage of writing up this data and have been helped considerably by the 'Qualitative Research Methods for Public Health' course.

The course was held over three days covering research design; data collection; data analysis and coding. It was attended by approximately 40 delegates from a variety of public health backgrounds, which added considerably to the richness of the content. There were a number of delegates from private and government healthcare funding bodies, focused on patient involvement in policy development, funding and outcomes, alongside academics from different disciplines and institutions, driving a strong practical element to the course in terms of content and outcomes.

The delivery of content was clear, supported by slides and a comprehensive written manual (which I am continuing to refer to as I write up my own data). Each taught element was reinforced with a practical exercise to illustrate and cement the concept being addressed. Several exercises proved to be invaluable from a personal perspective - explaining the underpinnings of my research to a non-musculoskeletal orientated audience made me realise how 'lost' I had become in technical, surgical language of my little world. Having the 'light bulb' moment when you realise no-one has a clue what you are talking about is a great impetus to return to the context of the real world when discussing research and delivering findings.

I applaud this course for seeking to demystify the language and concepts surrounding qualitative research. I am relieved to know that I do not need to be an accomplished theorist of philosophical paradigms to undertake qualitative research. A practical 'no-nonsense' approach was taken to principles, concepts and methodology, using understanding to enable choices of appropriate methods to employ, without throwing up the barriers of language that I have previously found so intimidating. Although I am sure there are some 'hard line' qualitative researchers out there who may disapprove of how this course was delivered, the delegate's left with improved confidence, understanding and enthusiasm. The relief was palpable and I was comforted to know that I was not the only one who had struggled with these barriers.

I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to attend this course and look forward to sharing the results of my qualitative research endeavours.