Growing interest in using qualitative data for improvement

Antonio Sanchez Vazquez *research fellow*

Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge CB1 1PT, UK

antonio.sanchez-vazquez@anglia.ac.uk

Shah makes a good point—if we are to find ways of improving (the quality of) patient care, we need to consider more than one perspective.1 Quality of care is a complex concept. Although we might agree on what it is not, it is harder to agree on an objective definition of what it is and how we can use available data to measure it. We must also keep the focus on quality improvement, not on performance targets and accountability. The Donabedian model and its dimensions of care (structure, process, and outcome) remain as insightful as when it was first proposed over 50 years ago.2 But getting the patient’s perspective on improving the quality of their care needs in-depth analysis based on qualitative data. There is a growing interest in these data; since Pope and colleagues published their paper on qualitative methods in 2002,3 monthly access gravitated around 20-60 until March 2017, when it started to increase steadily, reaching 500 in February 2019.4 We should encourage cross disciplinary research, including those with experience of qualitative health services research.5 Finally, findings must be acted on, and measuring quality improvement must become standard in the training of healthcare professionals and in the running of healthcare organisations. Otherwise, we risk measuring for measuring’s sake.

Competing interests: None declared.

1. Shah A. Using data for improvement. BMJ 2019;364:l189. 10.1136/bmj.l189 30770353

2. Donabedian A. Evaluating the quality of medical care. Milbank Mem Fund Q1966;44(suppl):166-206. 10.2307/3348969 5338568

3. Pope C, van Royen P, Baker R. Qualitative methods in research on healthcare quality.Qual Saf Health Care 2002;11:148-52. 10.1136/qhc.11.2.148 12448807

4. Statistics from Altmetric.com.https://qualitysafety.bmj.com/content/11/2/148.altmetrics

5. Williams V, Boylan AM, Nunan D. Qualitative research as evidence: expanding theparadigm for evidence-based healthcare. BMJ Evid Based Med 2019;10.1136/bmjebm-2018-111131. 30850372