



## Get the picture? Use of participant drawings in a novice's qualitative research

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**Introduction:** This paper discusses participant drawing as data in an interpretive phenomenological research project (the 'Documenting in the Medical Record: Experiences of Engagement' (DIMREE) project), currently underway at a rural hospital. The researcher's reflections on using drawing are presented with a view to informing and encouraging other novice and early researchers about the possibilities of this method for rural health research. The paper also presents results of a review of a section of the analysed data from the DIMREE project that sought to determine how drawings add to the research.

The DIMREE project explores *experiences of engagement between patients and health professionals around medical record documentation in a rural hospital*. Semi-structured interviews and participant drawings were the methods adopted for data generation. Visual creative methods are well established as legitimate data collection approaches within interpretive phenomenology. These methods can 'give voice' where words sometimes cannot be found.

**Method:** Participants drew a representation of their experience of engagement around medical record documentation prior to a phenomenological interview being conducted. Participants were then asked to explain their drawing. The review looked at incongruences and similarities across three data sources: 1) participant interpretations of their drawing viewed in the context of a particular theme 2) interview data viewed in the context of that same theme 3) Participant interpretation of their drawing viewed in the context of the experience overall. The review used one out of the four themes distilled from the data analysis. From this data two randomly-selected analysed participant data sets were interrogated to determine if the drawings as data 'added something' that might not have been identified through interviews alone. In addition to the review a personal written reflection summarised the novice rural researcher experience using the method.

**Results:** There was a level of incongruence between the data sources however using three complimentary data sources (drawing, participant interpretation of the drawing and interview data) was more valuable than relying on a single data source. There was context and metaphor within drawings, revealed by participants' interpretation. Drawings were a focus for the discussions that the participant reflected back to, both in their interpretation of the drawing and interview. The approach adopted may have helped maximise meaning-making for participants.

**Conclusion:** Asking participants to make a drawing of their experience can assist participants reflect on their experiences. Placing the drawing **prior to** the interview allows maximum time for this reflection and to share meanings of lived experience.

There are limitations associated with using the method: more time is required of participants who agree to both drawing and interview. In addition analysis from multiple data collection methods is a resource intensive commitment for the researcher. Nevertheless it is recommended that qualitative researchers, both experienced and novice, consider the possibilities for the use of visual creative methods use in the rural context.

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