Is there a place for qualitative research in evidence based medicine?

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YES
Questions?
For those of you who are still unsure...
What is the aim of EBM(P)?

To reduce uncertainty in clinical decision making, by incorporating appropriate current research evidence in decision making processes

(Flemming 2008)
Evidence Based Decision Making

- Evidence from research
- Clinical Experience
- Patient preferences
- Available resources
Evidence Based Decision Making

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EVIDENCE BASED DECISION
Hierarchy of evidence

Sys Reviews-Metanalysis
RCT's
Cohort studies
Case-Control
Cross-sectional studies
Case series, Case reports
Ideas, opinions, editorials, anecdotal

Where’s the qualitative research??
What research evidence feeds into this piece of the jigsaw depends on the question being asked.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>TYPE OF QUESTION</strong></th>
<th><strong>EXAMPLE</strong></th>
<th><strong>BEST DESIGN</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness of treatment</td>
<td>Are bisphosphonates helpful in the relief of pain secondary to bone metastases</td>
<td>Randomised controlled trials (RCTs) OR Systematic Review of Randomised Controlled Trials</td>
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<td>Causation</td>
<td>Are women who take HRT more likely to develop breast cancer?</td>
<td>Cohort Study</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feelings, understanding, perceptions</td>
<td>What are the views and perceptions of nurses on breaking bad news?</td>
<td>Qualitative research OR Systematic Review (Synthesis) of Qualitative Research</td>
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‘Methodologies cannot be true or false only more or less appropriate’

(Atkin and Chatoo 2006)
What is qualitative research?

• A form of naturalistic enquiry which seeks to study people in social settings
• It covers a very broad range of philosophical underpinnings and methodological approaches
• Aim is to provide an in-depth understanding of human behaviour, emotion, attitudes and experiences
• For example the way people manage their lives, health problems and dying are based on the meanings they accord to their illnesses and life circumstances
1. It can answer different clinical questions

A phenomenological study to understand patient and family experiences of health care services in the palliative stages of Parkinson’s disease

(Giles & Miyasaki 2009)

An ethnographic study tracing the changing notions of a good death held by hospice and palliative care practitioners

(McNamara 2004)
1. It can answer different clinical questions

A **phenomenological study** to understand patient and family experiences of health care services in the palliative stages of Parkinson’s disease

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(McNamara 2004)
What can it offer palliative care?

2. Contribute to understanding the complexity of health-care, through mixed-methods research

Mixed methods research is particularly valuable in palliative care where many interventions are complex and the identification of suitable outcomes is challenging (Farquhar et al 2011)

We need to understand the **context** in which treatments are effective in addition to **how** they are effective

Developing educational interventions for self-management of advanced cancer pain (Bennett, Flemming, Closs, Hughes – IMPACCT study)
3. Enhance the utility, effectiveness and applicability of findings from RCTs:

- Study planning
- Recruitment
- Randomization
- Study conduct
- Attrition and missing data
- Outcome measures
- Dissemination

(Flemming et al 2008)
4. It can even be synthesised!

Synthesis of qualitative research creates a *cumulative body* of evidence that builds and *develops theory* for practice in ways that individual studies cannot.

Qualitative research can *access sensitive, rare, and "difficult" phenomena*. Synthesising qualitative research allows *maximum value* to be gained from primary studies that have overcome problems in accessing and researching difficult settings.

Syntheses of qualitative research may also *complement quantitative research syntheses*, providing context for, and giving meaning to evidence of the effectiveness of interventions. (Flemming 2007)
Some examples:

Educational interventions for symptom management in advanced disease: a synthesis of qualitative research of health professionals’ knowledge attitudes and ability (Flemming et al 2012)

The Use of Morphine to Treat Cancer-Related Pain: A Synthesis of Quantitative and Qualitative Research (Flemming 2010)
Use of Evidence In Decision Making

Evidence from research
Clinical Experience
Patient preferences
Available resources

EVIDENCE BASED DECISION
• Flemming K. The synthesis of qualitative research and evidence based nursing. Evidence Based Nursing 2007;10: 68-71
• Giles S & Miyasaki J. (2009) Palliative stage Parkinson’s disease: patient and family experiences of health-care services. Palliative Medicine, 23, 120-125
• McNamara B. (2004) Good enough death: autonomy and choice in Australian palliative care. Social Science and Medicine, 58, 929-938