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Author post-print (accepted) deposited by Coventry University's Repository

Original citation & hyperlink:

Auta, A, Strickland-Hodge, B & Maz, J 2017, 'There is still a case for a generic qualitative approach in some pharmacy practice research' *Research in Social and Administrative Pharmacy*, vol 13, no. 1, pp. 266-268

<https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sapharm.2016.06.005>

DOI 10.1016/j.sapharm.2016.06.005

ISSN 1551-7411

ESSN 1934-8150

Publisher: Elsevier

NOTICE: this is the author's version of a work that was accepted for publication in *Research in Social and Administrative Pharmacy*. Changes resulting from the publishing process, such as peer review, editing, corrections, structural formatting, and other quality control mechanisms may not be reflected in this document. Changes may have been made to this work since it was submitted for publication. A definitive version was subsequently published in *Research in Social and Administrative Pharmacy*, [13, 1, (2016)] DOI: 10.1016/j.sapharm.2016.06.005

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Accepted Manuscript

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PII: S1551-7411(16)30107-3

DOI: [10.1016/j.sapharm.2016.06.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sapharm.2016.06.005)

Reference: RSAP 757

To appear in: *Research in Social & Administrative Pharmacy*

Received Date: 9 June 2016

Accepted Date: 10 June 2016

Please cite this article as: Auta A, Strickland-Hodge B, Maz J, There is still a case for a generic qualitative approach in some pharmacy practice research, *Research in Social & Administrative Pharmacy* (2016), doi: 10.1016/j.sapharm.2016.06.005.

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There is still a case for a generic qualitative approach in some pharmacy practice research

Pharmacy practice researchers are increasingly employing qualitative research to understand complex social problems.¹ This is as a result of the value of qualitative research in exploring people's experience, behaviour and emotions, and in understanding a phenomenon from the participants' perspectives.

Qualitative research involves a wide range of philosophies and approaches and has been variously classified and described in the literature. Creswell identified five approaches to qualitative inquiry namely the narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study.² However, a number of other approaches exist including autoethnography, participatory action research and conversational analysis.^{2,3} These conventional approaches are increasingly employed in healthcare research including pharmacy practice research and sometimes researchers feel obligated to adopt these approaches in their qualitative studies.⁴ However, our experience in one of our studies still makes a case for a generic approach in some pharmacy practice research. We therefore present a brief overview of the two qualitative approaches, phenomenology and grounded theory that we thought could be applicable to our research. Alongside, we discussed how for pragmatic reasons we decided to adopt a *generic approach* in our qualitative study. Our study was conducted to investigate stakeholders' views on the granting of prescribing authority to pharmacists in Nigeria.⁵ The objectives of our study were to explore the views of stakeholders on the facilitators and barriers to making prescribing a part of the clinical roles of pharmacists and to identify the potential changes needed for the development of pharmacist prescribing in Nigeria.

First, we considered phenomenology as an approach. Qualitative researchers generally employed a phenomenological approach to understand the essence of a 'lived experience' of a phenomenon for several individuals.² Therefore, some authors have argued that phenomenology is a philosophical approach that underpins all qualitative research because all qualitative research is conducted to uncover how people make sense of their experience.⁶ Participants in phenomenological studies are individuals who have experienced the phenomenon being investigated. In phenomenological studies, data are primarily collected through interviews. However, other sources of data including observations, poems, and documents have been used.^{2,6}

A number of pharmacy practice researchers including Makwosky et al.,⁷ have employed a phenomenological approach in their qualitative inquiry. In reference to our Nigerian study, a good research question for a phenomenological study would have been: "what does it mean to be a pharmacist prescriber?" Or "what is the nature of the experience of pharmacist

prescribing?” However, our Nigerian participants who included policymakers, doctors, pharmacists and patient group representatives have no experience of pharmacist prescribing. Furthermore, phenomenology mostly employs unstructured interviews to allow the study participants to describe the meaning of their experience with a phenomenon. This form of interview is usually driven by the interviewee. Hence, the specific objectives of our study are not likely to be achieved by this approach.

Grounded theory employs an iterative process of data collection and analysis to inductively generate theory for a process or an action through the data collected from participants who have experienced the process.^{2,8} There are at least three different approaches in grounded theory including the Glaser’s approach, Strauss and Corbin’s approach and constructivist grounded theory.⁸⁻¹¹ Details of these approaches are beyond the scope of this paper. Despite these different approaches, a key defining feature of grounded theory is the development or discovery of a theory or theories that are grounded in the data.² Hence, a grounded theory design is particularly useful where no theory exists to explain an action or process in a topic area.^{2,12} A number of pharmacy practice researchers including Adigwe et al.,¹³ have employed the principles of grounded theory in their qualitative investigations. A grounded theory approach would have been appropriate for our research if the aim was to generate a theory. However, generating a theory was not the explicit aim of our study as a number of theories or models of role expansion and practice change exist and have been used to explain human behaviour towards role expansion in pharmacy.^{14,15} Although a grounded theory approach would help in identifying barriers to pharmacist prescribing by looking at the concerns of stakeholders as they view allowing pharmacists to prescribe, this approach would however, fail to identify potential changes needed (i.e. what can be done?) for the development of pharmacist prescribing in Nigeria. This is because grounded theory is one of sociological action and looks at documented behaviour of study participants; for example, what people do to resolve their concerns rather than what can be done.^{8,11} Since prescribing is not currently implemented in Nigeria, applying a grounded theory approach to answer this research question was considered inappropriate.

In view of the limitations associated with the approaches described above, a generic approach to inquiry was considered appropriate for our qualitative study. A generic qualitative research approach seeks to “discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and world views of the people involved”¹⁶ rather than lay emphasis on philosophical underpinnings.¹⁷ Generic approaches have also been referred to as qualitative description and interpretative description in the literature.^{4,12} Many qualitative research studies in pharmacy practice including Kamarudin et al.,¹⁸ were not underpinned by any of the established strategies of inquiry. Researchers employ a generic approach in their studies

for practical reasons such as an inability to find a specific approach that fits the study, making the research aim a priority over a philosophical stance, and a desire to accurately represent participants' views.^{4,12} These practical reasons lie behind the choice of a generic approach in our qualitative study.

Conflict of interest

The authors do not have any conflict of interest to declare.

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