

## Book review

# Using research in primary care: a workbook for health professionals

Alan Gillies,  
*Abingdon: Radcliffe Medical Press, 2002, pp vi, 148,*  
*ISBN 1 85775 936 2*

Many introductory textbooks have been published on research methodology. 'Using research in primary care' does not fit into what one may expect in this respect.

At first glance, the text seems pretty short for experienced researchers, but looking behind the curtains, Gillies shows the way how to get direct and easy access to a vast amount of knowledge through the internet support by visiting the website:

<http://www.usingresearchinprimarycare.co.uk>

The reader only derives satisfaction from this workbook by using it in combination with the use of the above-mentioned website.

The book addresses 20 topics grouped into 4 parts:

1. The first part includes a short introduction on theoretical perspectives at science, the scientific method in general and its translation in the research life cycle, ethics in research and the preliminary investigation of literature (literature review) related to the research problem. The author singled out the main issues and gives the reader a brief introduction. However, the reader discovers quite soon that without following the instructions it does not establish the appropriate reference frame for learning by exploring the fundamentals of research theory and methods. The expectation that the reader will be able to prepare (with assistance) an application to a local ethics committee seems unrealistic.

2. Part two comprises methods for quantitative research introducing the reader to some research designs, questionnaire's design and widely used methods of sampling. Randomised controlled trials (RCT), surveys and questionnaire design are introduced in the textbook, guided by checklists and many relevant questions supported by on-line resources. One chapter introduces the reader into sampling methods, bias and validity. The references to literature are significant and relevant and most of the publications the reader should read are excellent. However, Chap-

ter 10 on data analysis never will make the reader a skilled data-analyst who is able to distinguish between apparently similar statistical techniques. Even an easy accessible statistical text book (the author refers to the BMJ best seller from Swinscow and Campbell "Statistics at square one") needs clarification by oral lectures in combination with professionally guided practice using real data-sets.

3. Part three gives a thorough and exhaustive introduction to the methodology of qualitative research (Chapter 13). The introduction to ethnography and grounded theory, and focus groups relatively short but is a good start for those who are new in this field of qualitative research. Although the chapter on interview techniques gives the opportunity to download an audio version in order to try transcribing an interview, this kind of learning by doing (without feedback of an experienced qualitative researcher) may lead to invalid results. Open-ended questionnaires for qualitative research are linked to recent studies on a heterogeneous set of topics.

4. This final part is a brief introduction to issues such as: how to write a research proposal, a research report and some reflections on evidence-based healthcare. For Danish, German, French or Dutch readers who have different systems and regulations in the application for research grants, these chapters may be less relevant.

This book is not designed for the most experienced researchers. But it is very useful for those readers who have no research experience in their daily practice but feel the need to evaluate, with the most appropriate design and methods, for example the efficacy of new treatments, of innovations in the field of integrated care etc. Despite some minor shortcomings, the book's segments are clearly presented and easily accessible for health professionals who are motivated to enter the field of research. This book provides a broad and exhaustive introduction to research in a concise, easy to read and use format. The strength of this book is that it continuously pushes the reader to become active as 'the proof of the pudding' is in reading the papers from the on-line resource. Gillies leads the reader by the hand by referring to the excellent sources of information accompanying each chapter. At the end of each chapter the reader can check

whether he is able to apply and reproduce acquired knowledge. A weakness is that the websites the book is referring to are under reconstruction or are not accessible by:

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