

Virtual Course on Qualitative Research for Primary Care Professionals

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: training in qualitative research is a key component of continuing education for Primary Health Care (PHC) professionals, as it strengthens methodological competencies and contributes to professional development. The aim was to describe the implementation and systematization of a qualitative research course, highlighting challenges, decisions, and lessons learned, as well as participants' feedback.

Materials and methods: a virtual course consisting of two synchronous sessions, held in 2023 during evening hours, with a participatory methodology based on real-life examples. It was financially supported by the Argentine Federation of Family and General Medicine. Teaching fees were covered, but the course was offered free of charge to members of the scientific society. Attendance was recorded, an anonymous post-session survey was administered, and certificates granting credits for specialty recertification were issued.

Results: despite 39 pre-registered participants, only 41% attended, with 18 participants in the first synchronous session and 10 in the second. Most participants were from the provinces of Córdoba, Buenos Aires, and Misiones. Almost all respondents indicated they would likely apply what they had learned and would recommend the activity to colleagues. Overall satisfaction with the practical component and the interactive, participatory format was highlighted, although suggestions included improving the readability of some slides and adjusting the pace of the presentation. Three certificates of completion were issued (to those who submitted an individual asynchronous assignment on time), and 16 certificates of participation (without assessment).

Conclusion: the academic proposal was well received; participants valued the theoretical-practical methodology and the interactive approach, which fostered exchange and participation. Despite the initial interest reflected in pre-registrations, actual attendance suggests the need to explore barriers to participation in free training activities. The virtual format facilitated the inclusion of professionals from different provinces, and the small group size encouraged active participation. Feedback identified areas for improvement that could be optimized in future editions.

Keywords: primary care physicians, biomedical research, education, continuing, Argentina

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Curso virtual de investigación cualitativa dirigido a profesionales de Atención Primaria

RESUMEN

Introducción: la formación en investigación cualitativa es un componente clave de la educación continua para profesionales de Atención Primaria de la Salud (APS), ya que fortalece competencias metodológicas y contribuye al desarrollo profesional. El objetivo fue describir la implementación y sistematización de un curso de investigación cualitativa, destacando desafíos, decisiones y aprendizajes, así como la retroalimentación de los participantes.

Material y métodos: curso virtual de 2 encuentros sincrónicos, llevados a cabo en el año 2023, durante horario vespertino, con metodología participativa y mediante ejemplos reales. Fue apoyado económicamente por la Federación Argentina de Medicina Familiar y General, de la Argentina. Se contemplaron honorarios docentes, pero el curso se dictó de manera gratuita para miembros de la sociedad científica. Se registró asistencia, se administró una encuesta anónima posterior a los encuentros, y se entregaron certificados que otorgan créditos para recertificación de especialidad.

Resultados: a pesar de los 39 preinscriptos, solo el 41% participó efectivamente, con 18 presentes en el primer encuentro sincrónico y 10 en el segundo. Se constató procedencia mayoritaria de las provincias de Córdoba, Buenos Aires y Misiones. Casi la totalidad manifestó que probablemente aplicaría lo aprendido y recomendaría la actividad a otros colegas. Se destacó satisfacción general con la parte práctica y la dinámica-interactiva-participativa, aunque sugirieron mejoras en la legibilidad de algunas diapositivas y en el ritmo de la presentación. Se entregaron 3 certificados de aprobación (a quienes entregaron en tiempo y forma una consigna individual y asincrónica), y 16 de participación (sin evaluación).

Conclusión: la propuesta académica fue bien recibida; valoraron la metodología teórico-práctica y el enfoque interactivo, que favorecieron el intercambio y la participación. A pesar del interés inicial reflejado en las preinscripciones, la efectiva participación indica la necesidad de explorar barreras para estas actividades formativas gratuitas. La virtualidad facilitó la inclusión de profesionales de diversas provincias, y el número reducido favoreció la participación activa. La retroalimentación sugirió áreas de mejora que podrían optimizarse en futuras ediciones.

Palabras clave: médicos de Atención Primaria, investigación biomédica, educación continua, Argentina.

INTRODUCTION

Training in research is a fundamental component of continuing medical education in the academic field of health sciences, particularly in the context of Primary Health Care (PHC).¹ However, multiple barriers hinder the conduct of research projects, including limited access to training opportunities, protected research time, and resources specifically dedicated to qualitative research.²⁻⁶ Continuing professional education courses, particularly those delivered through virtual or blended learning formats, have proven to be effective tools for strengthening clinical research competencies by fostering methodological, analytical, and scientific communication skills.⁶⁻⁹ This approach allows health professionals to tailor their learning to their individual needs and availability while promoting active, competency-based learning.¹⁰

In Latin America, including Argentina, educational initiatives have been developed for PHC professionals to strengthen competencies in qualitative research and evidence-based practice, thereby contributing to professional development and improving clinical practice.

This article describes the implementation and systematization of a qualitative research course designed for PHC professionals, detailing the challenges encountered, the decisions made, the lessons learned from the instructors' perspective, and participant feedback. The experience aims to provide insights to inform the planning and improvement of future continuing education initiatives in research.

METHODS / DEVELOPMENT

This article presents a descriptive report of an educational experience focused on the implementation of a qualitative research module for Primary Health Care (PHC) professionals. The systematization was based on a retrospective analysis of records generated during the course, including attendance lists, satisfaction survey results, and qualitative feedback provided by participants.

This approach enables the documentation, analysis, and communication of the educational experience by incorporating both instructors' and participants' perspectives, while facilitating the identification of lessons

learned, challenges encountered, and opportunities to improve future educational initiatives.¹¹

Context

The Argentine Federation of Family and General Medicine (FAMFyG) is a scientific medical society whose mission is to contribute to the national healthcare system and the various organizations and institutions that comprise it across its different sectors by promoting a healthcare model centered on multidisciplinary health care teams, with family physicians and general practitioners who are strongly committed to Primary Health Care (PHC).

In 2023, the Board of Directors approved an educational initiative consisting of the development, dissemination, and implementation of four independent modules for active members of the specialty society. Each module was designed as a standalone course, allowing participants to enroll in one or more modules according to their interests and availability. It should be noted that this educational initiative has been partially analyzed in a previous publication, which described and evaluated Module 1.¹² As in the present study, the same surveys and evaluation criteria were used, which may account for certain similarities between the two articles. The present study specifically focuses on the analysis of Module 3, which formed part of the comprehensive four-module educational program. The modules were strategically promoted before the national congress to encourage the submission of abstracts and to facilitate the preparation of higher-quality scientific work.

DESCRIPTION OF THE EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION

The educational initiative was designed to provide both theoretical and practical training in qualitative research in Primary Health Care (PHC). It consisted of two synchronous sessions (held on July 27 and August 3, 2023), each lasting two hours.

The course was delivered as a theoretical-practical workshop, encouraging the exchange of opinions and experiences among colleagues, through the Zoom platform, which enabled real-time remote participation, and using a small-group format that promoted interaction among participants. The virtual format was intentionally chosen to facilitate the participation of health professionals from different provinces across Argentina (Appendix 1).

The curriculum covered all stages of the qualitative research process, from study design to publication of findings:

- a) Theoretical and methodological foundations (e.g., constructivist paradigm, phenomenology, grounded theory).
- b) Research designs (e.g., participatory action research, case studies, ethnography).
- c) Data collection methods (e.g., in-depth interviews, participant observation, document analysis, among others).

- d) Data analysis and software applications (e.g., thematic analysis, content analysis, grounded theory).

- e) Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and management of researcher subjectivity.¹³

- f) Scientific writing and dissemination of results, emphasizing clear and coherent reporting in accordance with scientific standards.

The course was intentionally scheduled in the evening (7:00-9:00 PM) to maximize accessibility and enable participation from home outside regular working hours. The dates were also strategically selected to precede the deadline for submitting research abstracts and proposals to the national scientific meeting (21st FAMFyG National Congress, 21st National Meeting of Family and General Medicine Residents, and 8th National Congress of Professors), held from October 4 to 7, 2023, in Posadas, Misiones.

Each session was led by two instructors. One served as the lead instructor and presenter, while the other acted as co-instructor and moderator (e.g., facilitating questions raised by participants through the “raise hand” feature or chat), as well as recording attendance on internal rosters required for certificate issuance.

Certificates of attendance were awarded to participants who attended the sessions only (2 or 4 hours), whereas certificates of completion were granted to those who submitted an individual, asynchronous assignment within the established deadline as a complementary course requirement. All certificates awarded the continuing education credits required for ongoing professional development and were valid for specialty recertification.

Evaluation of the Educational Experience

An anonymous post-course survey was administered using a Google Forms questionnaire (Appendix 2). The survey included items assessing participant satisfaction, level of understanding of the course content, and perceived usefulness of the teaching methodology. In addition, a qualitative analysis was conducted on the written reflections submitted by participants at the end of the module.

Data Analysis

Quantitative variables (e.g., age, sex, and participants' province of residence) were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Qualitative data (e.g., responses to open-ended questions) were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns.

RESULTS

A total of 39 individuals preregistered for the course, most of whom were women (84.6%) and board-certified physicians rather than residents (64.1%). Participants were primarily affiliated with the Córdoba Association of Family and Community Medicine (20.5%), the Metropolitan Association of Family Medicine (12.8%), the Misiones Association of General/Family Medicine and Health Care Teams (10.2%), with the remainder representing other organizations.

According to the attendance records, 16 individuals (41.0%) actively participated in the course. The synchronous sessions were held on July 27 and August 3, with 18 participants attending the first session and 10 the second.

Table 1 summarizes participant characteristics according to the type of certificate awarded (attendance or completion). Regarding feedback on the educational activities (Table 2), all participants reported that they were very likely to apply what they had learned in their professional practice and to recommend the course to others.

Table 3 summarizes the positive aspects of the course (to be maintained) and the areas identified for improvement, including representative participant quotations. Positive aspects included the usefulness of the practical activities, the use of real-world examples, the dynamics of the synchronous sessions, and the opportunities for discussion and exchange. Suggested improvements included enhancing the readability of the slides, providing a greater number of examples – particularly for the theoretical framework– expanding coverage of data collection techniques (such as interviews and focus groups), moderating the pace of the presentations, and improving the clarity of some diagrams.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this educational experience highlight the challenges encountered, the decisions made, and the lessons learned, providing valuable insights that may help others replicate or adapt similar initiatives within their own settings.

Initial enrollment demonstrated considerable interest in the course (39 preregistered participants), although actual attendance was 41%, with 18 participants attending the first session and 10 the second. The virtual format enabled the participation of professionals from different provinces, eliminating geographic barriers and promoting inclusiveness.¹⁴ With advances in technology and social media, distance learning has become an innovative and rapidly expanding approach to the education of health care professionals at both undergraduate and

postgraduate levels.¹⁵ However, the discrepancy between preregistration and attendance reflects limitations related to scheduling, competing professional responsibilities, and pre-congress commitments, suggesting that earlier dissemination of the course and reminder strategies could improve participation.

The scientific society's institutional, financial, and logistical support was essential to ensuring the course's accessibility, covering faculty honoraria, and offering the program free of charge to participants. The education of health professionals requires ongoing reflection to respond to the needs of a society in constant transition, particularly within today's challenging social and economic context, which directly or indirectly affects healthcare systems.¹⁶

Aligned with our findings, other local publications have emphasized that competency-based education is not focused solely on the accumulation of knowledge, but rather on the practical application of skills.¹⁷ This pedagogical approach, grounded in real-world situations, is essential for training future health professionals.^{16,18} Although the low survey response rates (39% and 20%) represent a methodological limitation and a potential source of information and response bias, the data obtained provide a useful basis for reflection and may help inform the design of future educational initiatives in this field, particularly when planning subsequent course offerings. Furthermore, while the survey instrument successfully captured key information regarding participation, satisfaction, and participants' perceptions, we acknowledge that it could have been designed to explore additional dimensions of the teaching-learning process.

Given that both practicing physicians and residents often have limited research experience and typically lack formal training opportunities to address the challenges of conducting research and scientific writing,⁶ this course proved to be both highly valuable and much needed. However, two two-hour sessions constitute a very brief educational intervention and do not allow for an in-depth exploration of all aspects of scientific research or for individualized guidance comparable to a mentorship program. Therefore, scientific societies, professional associations, foundations, and medical organizations

Table 1. Characteristics of Participants in Module 3 of the FAMFYG Research Course, 2023

	n: 16	
	Participated (n: 13)	Passed (n: 3)
Sex		
Female	76.9% (10)	100% (3)
Male	23.1% (3)	-
Submitted the assignment on time	-	100% (3)
Passed the asynchronous assignment	-	100% (3)

Table 2. Feedback Responses for Each Synchronous Session

	Session 1	Session 2
Number of participants attending the synchronous workshop	18	10
Response rate	38.8% (7)	20.0% (2)
Why did you decide to enroll in and participate in this workshop		
To learn more about the topic	71.4% (5)	50% (1)
To learn how to apply the knowledge	42.9% (3)	50% (1)
Because someone recommended it to me	-	-
Out of curiosity	14.3% (1)	-
Other	14.3% (1)	-
How likely are you to apply what you learned in practice?		
Very likely	85.7% (6)	100% (2)
Likely	14.3% (1)	-
Somewhat likely	-	-
Unlikely	-	-
I don't know / Prefer not to answer	-	-
How likely are you to recommend this workshop to others?		
Very likely	100% (7)	100% (2)
Likely	-	-
Somewhat likely	-	-
Unlikely	-	-
I don't know / Prefer not to answer	-	-

should evolve into spaces that foster intergenerational collaboration,¹⁹ promoting the inclusion of younger generations, encouraging early-career professionals to assume leadership roles, and providing long-term longitudinal mentorship.

Similarly, the American Thoracic Society launched the Methods in Epidemiologic, Clinical, and Operations Research (MECOR) Program in 1994 with the goal of establishing a sustainable mechanism to strengthen local and national research capacity. By 2013, a total of 1,015 participants had completed at least one level of the program; 64% had published a scientific article, 79% had presented their work at a scientific or academic meeting, 51% had submitted a research protocol to obtain funding, and 42% had successfully secured

research funding.²⁰ Likewise, our course contributed to strengthening competencies in qualitative research and scientific writing, facilitating the preparation of clear and informative abstracts that are essential for disseminating research findings at scientific conferences.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study contribute to the development of context-specific knowledge regarding the teaching of qualitative research within continuing professional education. They also provide a useful foundation for both redesigning this educational initiative and informing the development of future training programs.

Table 3. Feedback for the Teaching Team on the Academic Activity (Including Verbatim Comments)

Positive Aspects	Negative Aspects
<p>Inclusion of Real-World Examples</p> <p>"I especially appreciated the practical component, particularly the example texts and the highlighted sections."</p> <p>"The use of a sample paper as an example."</p> <p>"The practical approach used to deliver the classes."</p>	<p>More Examples</p> <p>"Examples of theoretical frameworks, methodological frameworks, theoretical foundations, and problem statement writing."</p>
<p>Interaction and a Supportive Learning Environment</p> <p>"The session was excellent—very warm and highly interactive."</p> <p>"The exchange of ideas was extremely enriching and allowed us to explore current topics in greater depth."</p> <p>"I liked the way the instructor encouraged participants to engage in discussion and read aloud."</p> <p>"The workshop is dynamic and fosters interaction."</p>	<p>Additional Topics Suggested</p> <p>"I would vote for a module on scientific writing." ***</p> <p>"The workshop could include more content on data collection techniques (e.g., how to conduct interviews and focus groups)."</p>
<p>Breaks and Active Participation</p> <p>"The use of breaks with exercises helps maintain attention."</p>	<p>Visibility Issues</p> <p>"The slides should use larger font sizes to improve readability."</p> <p>"Some slides had text that was too small."</p> <p>"Some diagrams should be revised because they were difficult to read."</p>
<p>Interesting Content on Research Ethics</p> <p>"The discussion on anonymity and confidentiality."</p> <p>"How to store recordings and when they should be destroyed."</p> <p>"The section on ethics in qualitative research was very interesting."</p>	<p>Slower Presentation Pace</p> <p>"Speak more slowly"</p>

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APPENDIX 1

RESEARCH COURSE

Module 3 – Qualitative Methods

Thursdays, August 6 and 13, 7:00–9:00 PM

Instructor: Florencia Grande

Module 4 – Experience Report

Thursdays, August 29 and September 5, 7:00–9:00

PM

Instructor: Ana Godoy

APPENDIX 2

Module 3 – Session 1: Your Opinion About This Session

[Questions](#) | [Responses](#) | [Settings](#)

Your Opinion About Session 1 (Module 3)

Please share your thoughts on the session you just attended.

The data will be treated confidentially and may only be published in anonymized form.

Thank you very much!

Email address *

Valid Email address

This form collects email addresses. [Change settings](#)