



Grounded theory- evidence based medicine embeddedness: An enigmatic conundrum

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Abstract

Grounded Theory is the future of qualitative research. It has even made inroads into the vast arena of Evidence Based Medicine (EBM) which is a tributary and territory of Health Sciences. Grounded Theory is sitting pretty at the centre of a beautiful quincunx and imparting to the quincunx an ethereal and eternal beauty and bounty. The magnanimity of this quincuncial arrangement will appeal to all scholars actively pursuing their research with Grounded Theory methodology. In all probability, this marvellous piece of futuristic research is replete with the intellectual grace and moral spontaneity of the contemporary times. This theory is going to be all pervasive in the spatial and temporal dimensions of the present day society with its myriad of vicissitudes and commonalities. A schism may also be attributed to it so far as its opponents are concerned but those very opponents will have to eat an humble pie in the end. This theory is an embodiment of academic scholasticism as has been portended by its staunch exponents Strauss and Glaser. This paper attempts sincerely to draw congruencies and/or similarities between the practice of Evidence Based Medicine and its embeddedness in the Grounded Theory. Though Grounded Theory research in the vast area of Evidence Based Medicine is in its nascency, yet it is sure to make an everlasting impact so far as medical research is concerned. It is sincerely hoped that this axiomatization may not be consigned to the realms of the past. Future holds the key for the Evidence Based Medicine and Grounded theory continuum embeddedness.

Keywords: evidence based medicine (EBM), grounded theory, coding, hospital, training

Introduction

Evidence-Based Medicine

Evidence Based Medicine (EBM) remains a relatively young discipline still basking in its glory of nascency. EBM has been widely endorsed and has a profound influence on clinical practice. The process of lifelong self directed learning in which caring of patients creates a need for information about diagnosis, prognosis, treatment and other health related issues. As evidence based practitioners, doctors need to identify knowledge gaps and frame questions to fill those gaps, conduct efficient literature searches, critically appraise the research evidence and apply that evidence to patient care. Also, they should be able to distinguish high from low quality in primary studies, systematic reviews, Practice guidelines and other integrative research focussed on management recommendations. Doctors must also understand patients' circumstances or predicaments and identify their values and preferences for health care to be able to apply the evidence judiciously. The evolution toward evidence based practice can advance rapidly only if resident doctors adopt it early in their training. While previous experience emphasized the need for "hands on" clinical experience during training, recent reports have advocated "critical appraisal" as the core ingredient of the clinical training.

Grounded Theory

The aim of Grounded Theory is to generate or discover a theory. It may be defined as the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research. (Glaser and Strauss 1967:2). This theory is ideal for exploring integral

social relationships and the behaviour of groups where there has been little exploration of the contextual factors that affect individual's lives. (Crooks 2001)^[5, 13]. The main focus of this theory is to get through and beyond conjecture and preconception to exactly the underlying processes of what is going on, so that professionals can intervene with confidence to help resolve the participants' main concerns (Glaser 1978).

History of Grounded Theory

This theory was developed in the School of Nursing, University of California San Francisco by sociologists Glaser and Strauss- Awareness of Dying. The theory was also influenced by the symbolic Interactionism which states that human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them. The meanings are derived from the social interactions with the fellows. These meanings are handled in an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with these things. The sixties moved from natural science as the foundation of social research to the new way of investigating the social world. According to Denzin and Lincoln, there came a modernist moment where the realist ontology, an epistemology of objective truths which were generalizable, testable and verifiable and a proper place of the researcher and the researched was put on a firm platform leading to the discovery of a robust theory. It is also a bitter truth that this theory has been severely castigated due to its objectivist and positivist foundations.

Features of Grounded Theory

Charmaz (1995, 2002)^[9] has dilated upon various peculiarities

that grounded Theory may encompass:

- Simultaneous collection and analysis of data.
- Creation of analytical codes and categories developed from data.
- Discovery of basic social processes in the data.
- Inductive construction of abstract categories.
- Theoretical sampling to refine categories.
- Writing analytical memos as the stage between coding and writing.
- The integration of categories into a theoretical framework.

Hoshmand noted that qualitative Research Designs are particularly appropriate for meanings and perspectives of the participants.

Epilogue

It is abundantly clear that Grounded Theory approach brings out the factors which would not have been elucidated using some quantitative techniques. There is an ample room for further research in EBM using grounded theory as this theory has not gained much ground in medical literature. Grounded theory is a specific methodology on how to get from systematically collecting data to producing multivariate conceptual theory. It is a total methodological package. It provides a series of systematic, exact methods that start with collecting data and take the researcher to a really robust theoretical piece of philosophical literature. Grounded theory is used in part or in whole by researchers. When used in part, it is “adopt and adapt”, with other research methods woven in, based on training and judgment of the researcher involved. As once Strauss once said to Glaser, “Barney, we are 15 to 20 years ahead of our time.” Strauss was right in his observation so Glaser retorted, “Good, I can do other things and bide my time.” Various aspects of anaesthesia and obstetric care have the potential for exacting explanation if some researcher candidly and earnestly delves deep into the psychological and physical aspects of obstetric pain and its alleviation by myriad of anaesthetic techniques. Abundant data can be culled from patient population and categories framed from the raw data collected. It can become an immersion of the reality of pain from patients’ perspectives. No one is afraid of death but it is the pain of dying which one fears the most. The concept of Hospice care for the terminally ill patients in the ICUs is gaining momentum these days and a grounded theory approach using the data from the patients’ attendants can throw light on the quality of relief these patients are expected to gain when the concept of Hospice is in place. All this forms the gamut of EBM in Critical Care.

The grounded theory researcher has three important characteristics: an ability to conceptualize data, an ability to tolerate some confusion and an ability to tolerate confusion’s attendant regression. These attributes are necessary because they enable the researcher to wait for the conceptual sense making to emerge from the data. Some confusion is always there in medical phenomena because medicine is not an exact science. Hence Grounded theory will definitely pave the way for further insights into the uncharted seas of disease burden and their attendant ramifications in the form of psychological

impact of disease on society. Tuberculosis and Leprosy (Hensen’s Disease) are classical examples where Grounded theory can be of help to unravel the incidence and prevalence of these diseases in India. Here confusion is created because the patients hide their illnesses. So is the case of mental ailments where dystonic and not syntonic mechanisms are operable. Grounded theory is “what is”, not what should, could or ought to be.

There are fields like health, education and business-that require research on high impact dependent variables that helps them to understand and handle problems by imbue. Many grounded theory studies are now altering the preconceived processes in the fields of practice like EBM. For example, imposing treatment paradigms on patients that do not fit their lifestyles and thereby get ignored is changing to designing treatment regimes that fit their scheme of things so that there is a ray of hope for compliance. This is a classical example of the many preconceptions that are being altered by grounded theory. Grounded theory with its conceptual freedom from time place and received concepts gives the researchers a chance to openness, grab, freedom and the conceptualization provided by method employed for research. High impact dependent variables that are linked to research that yields good interpretations and theoretical accountings is highly motivating to the researchers. Hence its applicability and conditional susceptibility in EBM cannot be overemphasized. Grounded theorists should never be seen as crusaders, subversives or underminers. Grounded theorists engage themselves in incremental changes slowly and before that they analyse the functional requirements of maintaining the social fiction.

Grounded theory is rich in imageric concepts that are easy to apply” on the fly”. They are applied intuitively, with no data, with a feeling of “knowing” as a quick analysis of a substantive incident or area. They ring true with great credibility.

Justifying grounded theory embeddedness in evidence based medicine

The future of EBM will bring less need to legitimize Grounded theory. Hence there will be less need to justify using it. Its future portends that Grounded theory will be as accepted as are other methods in medical research. Its use in EMB will usher in an enlightened era both for Grounded theory as well as for Evidence Based Medicine.

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