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Nursing Research Editor
School of Nursing
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Dear Editor:

I am writing in reference to the article authored by Eun-Ok Im and Wonshik Chee entitled "An Online Forum as a Qualitative Research Method: Practical Issues" in the Nursing Research July/August 2006 issue. As a graduate student and a cardiac surgery intensive care nurse, I recognize the advantages the internet has to offer in data collection. With many cardiac surgery patients traveling over 70 miles for surgery at my facility, logistically the internet would be a great option for gathering follow-up patient data. I am writing with suggestions for further research as I feel this is an important topic to address and explore. Your consideration in publishing my letter would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

Jody McIntosh, RN, BSN, MS student at Towson University, Towson, Maryland

Dear Editor:

Thank you for publishing the great article on the subject of online forums for qualitative research. As a graduate student, I have been faced with the challenge of using online methods, such as discussion boards, to accomplish group work and participate in class discussions via the internet. It can certainly be a frustrating and intimidating experience for those not computer savvy.

In this era of internet usage and with patients often traveling great distances to receive care at specialty centers, an online forum seems like a practical idea for obtaining research data. The authors do an excellent job of pointing out the obvious advantages for using online forums as a research method. Confidentiality and convenience are certainly two of the most valuable advantages here. The practical issues that arose in their study are well defined and well explored.

The authors noted difficulty in attaining theoretical saturation because participants were only required to post 2 messages on the web site. Future studies of this nature should potentially include either more frequent postings or interactive data collection methods such as chat groups. The authors expressed in the article that when participants posted a simple 1 or 2 line message other participants were discouraged. They do not explore how they came to that conclusion or in what way other participants were discouraged. Were participants discouraged from posting longer messages or discouraged from posting at all? Since only cancer patients were targeted, it would be encouraging to see research conducted on other patient populations to see if similar or additional issues arise. It may also be advantageous to address strategies to overcome the issues.

The internet could prove a valuable tool in gathering qualitative patient information; although it is apparent that further research is necessary. I commend the authors for addressing an up-and-coming issue related to this type of data collection.

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