

Hermeneutic Phenomenology Research Approach: A Review of the Continuing Professional Development in the Clinical Speciality of Cardiology

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ABSTRACT

Background: The specialised clinical environment is very challenging and complex for nurses. Those working in such an environment need to constantly update their knowledge and skills in order to be proficient in their specialty. Phenomenology is a branch of philosophy and a research method used to reveal the unknown aspects of experience and explain phenomena. Nurse experience using online continuing professional development (CPD) provides an insight regarding this method of learning.

Aims: This paper reviews the role of phenomenology as branch of philosophy and research method to reveal staff experience in developing their advanced clinical skills using online CPD activities.

Results: There are several-reasons supporting the use of phenomenology as a research-methodology. First, the significance of phenomenology-research is to aid exploration of the lived-experience. This means exploring the originality of human-existence, life as it is lived and the original-dimensions. Second, phenomenology is concerned with human-world, and the world cannot be described without referring to personal-consciousness and experience. Third, phenomenological-research helps to reveal the internal-structure of lived-experience or the essence of phenomena. The essence can be sensed through studying details and facts encountered in the lived-experience and the language used to describe it. Fourth, phenomenological-research contextualises the lived-experience with deep and rich-meaning of the way that humans-act in their world. Fifth, phenomenological-research stimulates human thoughtfulness to wonder about life and perceive meanings for everyday-life-events. Finally, phenomenological-research is a poetising-project; poetising means talking, primally and ontologically, about original-experience, thus disclosing meaning of how it is like to be or exist in this life.

Conclusion: Phenomenological research is the most suitable approach for exploring and further understanding of human experiences and other human phenomena. The hermeneutic interpretive approach allowed the researcher to reveal the deeper meanings of the online CPD experience.

Keywords

Phenomenology, Lived-experience, Cardiology, Nurses, Continuing professional development (CPD), Online continuing professional development (O-CPD), Quality health care, Cost-effective care, Knowledge, Clinical skills, Education, Competency.

Introduction

Phenomenology is a branch of philosophy and a research method used to reveal the unknown aspects of experience and explain phenomena [1]. There is no definitive definition for phenomenology; however, most come from Husserl (1859-1938), the developer of the school of phenomenology. Spiegelberg [2] defined phenomenology as a name for a philosophical movement whose primary objective is direct investigation and description of phenomena as consciously experienced, without theories about their casual explanation, and are free from unexamined preconceptions and presuppositions'. In nursing, phenomenology is used as a research methodology to investigate, explore and describe phenomena related to the profession [1].

Merleau-Ponty [3] offered an extensive description of the meaning of phenomenology; he described phenomenology as the study of definitions of essence, that is, the essence of perception and the essence of consciousness. Also, he stated that phenomenology is the search of the philosophy of essence as it exists in the world as lived experience, without taking into consideration its psychological origin and scientist, historian and the sociologist fundamental explanation to the phenomena [4].

In 1983, Wanger further explained phenomenology as a system of interpretation that aids individuals to identify and recognise themselves, others and everything they are in contact with within a specific lived experience [1]. The descriptions of phenomenology given by Merleau-Ponty (1962), Spiegelberg (1975) and Wanger (1983) address it as a philosophy and method that focusses on giving meaning to lived experience.

The phenomenological movement progressed through three phases: the preparatory phase, the German phase and the French phase. The preparatory phase was developed by Brentano (1838-1917) and Stumpf (1848-1939). This phase focused on the concept and clarification of intentionality. Intentionality refers to the consciousness of something. In other words, the preparatory phase involved discovering the phenomena in the consciousness of individuals [1].

The German phase was developed by Husserl (1857-1938) and Heidegger (1889-1976). This phase focused on the concepts of essence, intuiting and phenomenological reduction. Essence reflects the basic common understanding of a phenomenon [1]. In other words, to understand the phenomena purely as it is, free from phenomenologist assumptions. The concept of intuiting represents the common understanding of a phenomenon, which is driven by the researcher's imaginative and comprehensive interpretation of data [1].

The French phase was developed by Marcel (1889-1973), Sartre (1905-1980) and Merleau-Ponty (1905-1980). In this phase, phenomenologists focused on the concept of embodiment. This refers to an individual's consciousness of being in the world, which is reflected through their thoughts and acts. This is considered to be the foundation of their perception of particular phenomena [1].

The process of phenomenological inquiry was developed to explain the essence of particular phenomena by describing every day lived experiences using rigorous, critical and systematic investigation [1]. Furthermore, the process of phenomenological inquiry was developed to find a common meaning that reflects the essence of each phenomena [1]. The process of phenomenological inquiry can lead to development of a description and interpretation that is related to an individual's understanding of the meaning of being a person in a particular world.

The purpose of phenomenological inquiry is to provide a rich and detailed description of a lived experience, which results in developing a full understanding of phenomena that is embedded within an individual's experience [5]. Polit and Beck [6] stated that an individual's perception of a phenomenon is influenced by their lived experience, so phenomenology (which involves the study of lived experiences) can help to reveal the meaning of the phenomenon.

The phenomenological research aims to achieve a better understanding of an individual's lived experience by revealing the unknown aspects of a phenomenon within the experience [1]. In nursing, knowledge gained from discovering the hidden aspects of a phenomenon can lead to improvements in the profession. As noted by Schneider, Whitehead [5], phenomenological research is very applicable to nursing because it allows researchers to explore questions in depth, and it reflects the values and beliefs that are important to the profession. Understanding the patient experience in-depth helps nurses to rationalise patient behaviours and actions toward their disease's treatments or care.

Oiler [7] provided further justification for the practicality of using the phenomenological approach in nursing. He indicated that the knowledge gained from this type of research helps to bring about holistic nursing care, which is at the core of the profession. Furthermore, using a phenomenological approach to understand the patient experience, concerning the patient's quality of life, the patient-nurse relationship and the patient's health-related values, can help nurses to advocate for patient rights to exercise their own choices when making health-related decisions [7].

Methods

As phenomenological research is based on schools of philosophical thought, variation is common in terms of methods, interpretations and presentations of findings. There are two main approaches to phenomenological research, developed by the phenomenologist, Husserl, and his student, Heidegger. Phenomenological research has undergone a period of transition over the years from when a

piece of phenomenological research consisted of a pure description of an experience (as developed by Husserl), to the situation where phenomenological research can involve an interpretation of an experience (as developed by Heidegger). Gadamer and Ricoeur developed Heidegger's work further [8].

The philosophy of Edmund Husserl (1859–1939) focused on describing human experience, as reflected in what is seen, heard, believed, remembered, felt, acted and evaluated [6]. Using Husserl's descriptive philosophy, the researcher attempts to achieve deep understanding of a phenomenon without the influence of previously acquired knowledge, experience or perceptions related to that phenomenon [9]. The epistemological approach is concerned with gathering knowledge about objects through conscious awareness. Husserl perceived individuals as subjects and everything around them as objects. Furthermore, Husserl utilised the question of 'how are these phenomena known?' via a descriptive approach that explores unknown knowledge about the lived experience in three steps: intuition, essence and bracketing [1]. Intuition means deep engagement with the phenomenon as described, without researcher predication or attempt to criticise or evaluate it; the aim is to describe and understand the phenomenon as precisely as possible [10]. The second step is to identify the essence of the phenomenon. In this step, the researcher revisits participant comments and descriptions of their experience to extract common themes [1]; in this step the researcher uses the themes to construct a connection in line with the phenomena reflected in a specific essence [1]. In the third step, the researcher tries to reach the essence of the phenomena by describing the extracted essence without putting existing knowledge or perceptions about the phenomena into the description [8]. The bracketing approach enables the researcher to think beyond knowledge, seeking the true consciousness of an object [5].

Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) was the primary founder of philosophy as an interpretive approach, also known as modern hermeneutics. Fundamentally, the interpretive approach derives from the descriptive approach. Heidegger argued that interpretation is a basic human characteristic, inherited in human experience [6]. Furthermore, Schneider, Whitehead [5] states that Heideggerian philosophy refers to the notion of being or belonging in this world. He emphasised that it is an individual's awareness of their own existence and belonging in this world that makes them able to interpret and reflect on their own experience. Heideggerian interpretive phenomenology emphasises understanding the human experience, rather than just describing it. Heidegger took into account background and social context, which influence individual presumptions, to obtain holistic and deep understanding of the experience and the phenomena behind it [11]. This rationalises facts by engaging with presumptions and presuppositions around the phenomena, and not suspending them in interpreting the experience. In addition, Heideggerian phenomenology began to be developed as a research tool because interpretation is involved with collecting rich and deep textual description of a lived experience. The researcher who adopts this approach starts interpreting by engaging their knowledge, experience and perceptions with the

phenomenon, and continues interpreting by listening to participant descriptions of the lived experience [12]. The aim of the interpretive approach is ontological, which means the researcher obtains the actual meaning of phenomena by interpreting the lived experiences as described. Furthermore, the interpretive process in this approach builds upon what is known and understood before the interpretation itself. Also, it reveals whatever is known totally by sense and proposes deep meanings related to it. As a result, the reality of the lived experience is disclosed and the phenomenon is revealed [12]. Therefore, and based on the same concept, Schneider, Whitehead [5] found the interpretive approach to be practical for investigating the lived experience in nursing practice.

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) shaped Heidegger's interpretive philosophy by introducing the hermeneutic circle, an evolutionary version of Heideggerian interpretive hermeneutic philosophy. The hermeneutic circle is primarily based on the original work of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1834) and Wilhelm Dilthey (1911), as well as work of Heidegger and Ricoeur's (1976) contribution. Mainly, their work adopts philosophical hermeneutics as the philosophy of understanding through interpretation [13]. Interpretation reveals the relationships and meanings that knowledge and context have to each other [1]. Schleiermacher's hermeneutic philosophy broadens the scope of interpretive phenomenology to gain the larger significance of the task, beyond narrow criticism and specific statements, with the aim of reconstructing the past [14]. Dilthey continued Schleiermacher's work and extended it to seek an approach that reveals phenomena related to human science [15]. Human science is the study of meaning, experimental or textual, in descriptive or interpretive patterns [16]. Dilthey argued that the method that facilitates understanding expressions and actions in every day human life cannot be similar to the method used to understand the natural sciences [15]. He emphasised in his work the use of the hermeneutic process based mainly on interpretation to facilitate understanding of the meaning behind human actions. Consequently, Gadamer further applied textual hermeneutics to the human experience by application of the hermeneutic circle. It is an approach whereby interpretation takes place in a circular process, from the whole to the part of the individual and then from the part of the individual to the whole, in order to achieve understanding [17]. Gadamer, in his phenomenological hermeneutics, carefully explored language, nature of the question, phenomenology of human conversation and the significance of presupposing [14]. Although most philosophers of hermeneutic phenomenology did link presumption into interpreting human experience, Gadamer advocated engaging human presupposing in exploring human experience, as he asserted that prejudice is embedded in historical consciousness and is part of human knowledge [14]. However, he found the understanding of human experience cannot be controlled by any specific method or set of rules, but can be developed by dialogue [14]. Gadamer extended the analysis of human understanding, and his deep reflection on the role of language and dialogues shaped the qualitative research approach of hermeneutic phenomenology [15].

Exploring registered nurses lived experience of using an on line CPD program required a structured methodology that revealed every essence encountered and promoted deep understanding. The emphasis on understanding through interpretation in Gadamer's philosophy certainly brought in new knowledge regarding this type of professional development education.

Any inquiry related to 'the ordinary experience that we live in and that we live through for the most, if not all, of our day to day existence' is a phenomenological inquiry [14]. Traditionally, a scientific method consisting of a set of rules, trials, treatments, or procedures is used to investigate an inquiry. In contrast, the elements pertaining to the phenomenality of human experience, such as text, words, speech and emotions, require different measures that serve the purpose of phenomenology or of giving meaning to the lived experience [14]. Van Manen [16] listed several reasons supporting the use of phenomenology as a research methodology. First, the significance of applying phenomenology to research is to aid exploration of the lived experience. This means exploring the originality of human existence, life as it is lived and the original dimensions. Second, phenomenological research reveals phenomena as present in consciousness. Van Manen [16] stated that phenomenology is concerned with the human world, and the world cannot be described without referring to personal consciousness and experience. Thus, phenomenological research is applicable in discovering the human world through the consciousness of individuals. Third, phenomenological research helps to reveal the internal structure of lived experience or, in other words, the essence of phenomena [16]. The essence can be sensed through studying details and facts encountered in the lived experience and through the language used to describe it [16]. Fourth, phenomenological research contextualises the lived experience with deep and rich meaning of the way that humans act in their world [18]. Fifth, phenomenological research stimulates human thoughtfulness to wonder about life and perceive meanings for everyday life events [16]. Finally, phenomenological research is a poetising project; poetising means talking, primarily and ontologically, about original experience [16], thus disclosing meaning of how it is like to be or exist in this life.

There is a close link between phenomenology and hermeneutics. Hermeneutics means seeking understanding and knowledge of through interpreting language elements, such as words or texts. Phenomenology is the study of lived experience and explicating common and shared meanings. Extending the meanings of these two can bring hermeneutics and phenomenology together for use as a research methodology. However, van Manen [14] elaborated by stating that the long history of philosophical tradition of phenomenological development appears to complicate its descriptive and interpretive elements, so phenomenology became 'descriptive, interpretive, linguistic and hermeneutics' [14]. He further explained that description and interpretation take place to enhance understanding of the phenomena related to live experience.

Nursing research acknowledges hermeneutic phenomenology and its implications as a research method. It has certain positive features suitable to researching phenomena related to nursing as a profession and patient experiences. For instance, the nature of nursing as a knowledge-body discipline and professional practice attributable to the cultural, social and economic context, suggests using the hermeneutic phenomenology research method to disclose profession-related phenomena. Furthermore, knowledge developed by this approach is in descriptive and exploratory form, which enhances rich and deep understanding of the meaning related to professional knowledge and practice [19].

Munhall [20] emphasised upon the understanding of patient related activities and various lived experiences in developing nursing care plans. This change in nursing practice can be perused through hermeneutic phenomenological research. Phenomenology brings up the patient's original experience within the everyday situation of their disease, and the hermeneutic perspective constructs nursing understanding of the meaning of that experience. Relatively, this understanding is discussed and communicated, between each other and other professions, aiming to promote best practice [19]. In other words, practice change is accrued based on understanding the meaning embedded in the patient experience. Another positive feature of hermeneutic phenomenological research is subjectivity in expressing the experience generally, leading the researcher to access the context, which may have a deep influence in their practice, such as the socio-political context [19]. Consequently, nurses grasp the meaning of patient experience to further their practice and meet patient needs. An additional feature in hermeneutic phenomenology is the hermeneutic circle. The open dialogue feature in the hermeneutic circle allows the patient or nurse to speak about their experiences in their own narrative without direction, apart from maintaining focus on the experience [21]. The aim of open dialogue is to gather rich data from participants to achieve deeper understanding. In brief, the use of hermeneutic phenomenology to underpin nursing research discloses phenomena rooted within every day nursing practice. Describing and interpreting the narration is a path to seeing new meanings, and the truth of knowledge of the discipline.

Gadamer did not offer a methodology or a method for conducting research into hermeneutic phenomenology. Primarily, Gadamer's aim, as he describes it, was to reveal the conditions that facilitate understanding [17]. The principle and process of understanding cannot be restricted to specific guidelines, or a qualitative or quantitative method [22]. However, Gadamer hermeneutic concepts considered when exploring hermeneutic phenomenology, as described next.

Gadamer [22] 'has defined belonging to tradition as the conceptual word in which philosophizing develops has already captivated us in same way that the language in which we lived conditions us. The historical and cultural traditions to which men and women belong participate in developing assumptions and expectation of how the world works; it gives basic meaning to experiences. Prejudices, or

pre-understanding of experience, are the passage through which we understand the phenomena related to the experience [23].

Gadamer claims that the 'interpreter is always located in a situation' [23]. This establishes a standpoint and restricts interpreter ability to visualise beyond that standpoint. Anything that influences the interpretation process also influences the meaning within the experience. Therefore, Gadamer emphasises the consciousness of the hermeneutic situation, which is created through the foregrounding process [23]. Foregrounding is 'the process of something coming or being put in the foregrounding' [23]. As explained in earlier sections, prejudice is a vital element in interpretation, and it is needed to achieve understanding. Therefore, prejudices must be validated, as done thorough the foregrounding process. Prejudice has to be provoked, however, in order to be validated when it is encountered within the text. Gadamer explains that the text is as vital as the prejudice; it holds its own meanings and values [23].

'The discovery of the true meaning of a text or a work of art is never finished; it is in fact infinite process because every new interpreters will bring ever new horizons into contact with the work' [24]. Text is one element within hermeneutic research that strongly influences an understanding of the lived experience and the phenomena behind it. As stated in the previous point, the significance of text lies in its contribution to provocation of prejudice during the foregrounding process; this is necessary to achieve the hermeneutic situation. However, written text can sound like alienated speech and only provide isolated meanings [23]. Therefore, Gadamer (1978) stressed that text should be premise that dialectic movement occurs within the hermeneutic circle. This allows the interpreter to move within the text from whole to part and from part to whole. This in turn enriches the interpretation and guides reader understanding [23]. The dialectic movement is also considered to be an interpretation of the interpreter's fore-understanding, as it highlights the dialogue between the reader and the interpreter in an analytical manner.

In the hermeneutic process, understanding appears through fusion of the horizon. In other words, it occurs when the interpreter and participant can perceive the concept from one perspective. Gadamer (1978) states that the miracle of understanding is 'when the event and the evidence of truth that occur when the interpreter understand the concept of the text in such a way that they also include the interpreters own comprehension (begreifen) of them' [23].

Before expanding on Van Manen's contribution to the hermeneutic phenomenology research, it is important to distinguish between methodology and method in human science research. Methodology can be defined as the philosophical framework comprised of the fundamental assumptions and theoretical foundation of the perspective of human science. In other words, the assumptions underlying what it means to be human [16]. Whereas the notion of method in the humanities depends on the philosophical perspective of the methodology that underpins a particular

piece of research. There is currently no particular method for hermeneutic phenomenology research, but the wide contribution of phenomenological scholarship has established a set of principles, guidelines and recommendations that comprise the methods that guide hermeneutic inquiry [16].

Van Manen is an educational theorist who has used the philosophical theories and hermeneutic phenomenology concepts of Heiddger and Gadamer to establish six stages of research methods to guide hermeneutic enquiry [25]. van Manen's method is considered the most practical method because it gives the researcher freedom and flexibility to be involved with the process of hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry [25].

Results

The findings that Van Manen's structure breaks down hermeneutic phenomenology philosophical concepts into a six stage process, permitting the researcher to use this process to reveal the phenomena within the lived experience [16].

Stage One: Nature of the Lived Experience

van Manen [16] stated that 'every project of the phenomenological inquiry is driven by a commitment of turning to an abiding concern'. In other words, phenomenological inquiry emerges when there is a single thought that endures in people's thoughts and ignites the practise of thoughtfulness, or the fullness of thinking. In this stage, the researcher was deeply questioning thoughts related to the lived experiences of cardiac registered nurses using online CPD programs. Here, the researcher tried to make sense of their experiences by revealing meanings related to the phenomena encountered.

van Manen [16] pointed out that the nature and significance of the lived experience is revealed when the essence of something is interpreted. In addition, he stated that 'the term "essence" may be understood as a linguistic construction, discretions of phenomena'[16]. Being oriented to the phenomena shows the nature of the lived experience. A pre-understanding of the phenomena, and presumptions created about the phenomena, influence interpretation and disclose the nature of the lived experience [16].

Stage Two: Investigating the Experience As It Is Lived

This stage aims to explore the originality of the lived experience. van Manen [16] stated that revisiting the basic aspects of the lived experience results in an understanding of the phenomena present in the lived experience as itself and as it is lived. Theories can then be developed around the lived experience and it can be conceptualised. Additionally, the researcher is required to determine the relations and shared situations in the world of living to grasp a wholeness of the lived experience [16].

In this stage, the researcher must reflect on everything in the lived experience materials that may lead to some aspect of its fundamental nature. Lived experience materials refer to the approaches used to

gather data or 'datum', as described by [16]. Nevertheless, the researcher must realise that the lived experience will never be captured identically as it is. Therefore, the researcher must search for a way to access the dimensions of the lived experience to bring the closest meaning of the experience to the surface as much as possible.

The starting point for phenomenological description is through engagement with the personal experience. As it is possible for the experience to be an experience for others and vice versa, engaging with the personal experience is considered the starting point for phenomenological research [16].

When investigating the experience as it is lived, the researcher must trace etymological sources and idiomatic phrases within the language used by participants elaborating on their experience. Etymological sources take the researcher back to the origin of the words used, taking him or her to the originality of the lived experience. Idiomatic phrases originate from the experience itself, but they have to be figured that way to be an infinite source for phenomenological analysis, as they carry with them meanings that may help us understand the lived experience [14].

There are various sources for investigating the lived experience, such as interviews, observation, literatures, biographies, and art. According to van Manen [16] Investigating the experience as it is lived through collecting descriptive data from other people experiences leads to a deeper understanding of the meanings and significance of different aspects of the human experience within different contexts. Investigating the experience as it is lived can occur through writing a protocol that generates original text. The term protocol in phenomenological research refers to the original draft of the participant scripts [16].

The researcher sought deep understanding of the phenomena surrounding online learning and skills advancement. Therefore, the researcher considered unstructured interviews to be the most appropriate data collection method. The researcher's previous experience of online learning established a base of assumptions about, and a pre-understanding of the phenomena itself; these were incorporated into data analysis.

Stage Three: Reflecting on the Essential Theme

Reflection is rooted in phenomenological research because this is the path to comprehensive understanding of the phenomena of the lived experience. More specifically, the purpose of phenomenological reflection is to obtain essential meaning and essence of the phenomena of the lived experience [16]. In reality, the reflection process reveals the essence of the phenomena from multiple dimensions, through explicating structural meanings, themes, or units of meaning [16]. Van Manen [16] emphasises the importance of reflectively analysing structured meanings or themes as they are considered a reflection of a whole lived experience.

The emphasis is placed on establishing themes because they are considered to create the experiential structure from which their

lived experience is made. Extracting themes from the experience and text is also insightful as it is an inventive process of discovery and disclosure that reveals true meaning of the experience. In humanities research generally, and phenomenological research specifically, the desire to make meanings and make sense of them is at the centre of the field [16].

Stage Four: The Art of Writing and Rewriting

Phenomenology is the application of a 'logo' through which language and thoughtfulness relate to the phenomena. Therefore, phenomenological writing has to allow the language and thoughts to speak because language and thinking cannot be separated [16]. Gadamer [22] considered phenomenological writing to be a hermeneutic task because all isolated speech had to be transformed back into speech that carries meaning in order to obtain its essence.

Stage Five: Maintaining a Strong and Oriented Relation

The nature of hermeneutic phenomenological research and the richness of data it includes can easily pull the researcher from the focus of the question and notion of the lived experience. Researchers have stressed the importance of being strong and relation-oriented because the researcher in this type of research can be side-tracked or diverted from the main ideas [26]. He or she could also easily become fixed in one way of thinking, with one set of ideas or with specific perceptions, unintentionally ignoring the others. The researcher should be aware of the risk of centring their reflection and interpretation on their own pre-conceptions [16].

Establishing strong and oriented relations is mainly achieved through the phenomenological text. The way textual analysis is conducted helps to uphold the main concepts of the research and ensures a connection between the researcher, the context, and the interpretation [16]. Further discussion about how this researcher achieved this step is described in the analysis chapter.

Stage Six: Balancing Research Context by Considering Part as Whole

Even though data richness is a positive feature in the mind of the hermeneutic phenomenology researcher, it can put the researcher at risk of treating data superficially or not identifying it appropriately. Balancing the research context by considering a part as a whole is explained by van Manen [16], who states that one should measure the overall design of the study or text against the part that must play a significant role in the whole textual structure. This means that the researcher must conduct a constant retrospective check at several points between the text and context to ensure that each part of the study contributes to the whole.

Discussion

In qualitative research, rigour describes the establishment of trustworthiness between the researcher, participants and research reader [21]. Generally, the aim of rigour is to confirm that the information presented by the researcher, whether descriptive or interpretation, truly represents the participant experience [1]. Relating to this study specifically, interpretive research presents

a dialogue between the researcher and the text, or the reader and interpretation, and the themes that emerge from the text may not match the reader's view. The researcher should provide evidence to the reader and participants that the interpretation truly reflects the participant description of their experience [21]. Most criticism regarding qualitative research is truth of the data and whether interpretation truly represents the participant experience. Therefore, the researcher used the operational techniques of Sandelowski [27]: credibility, applicability, auditability and confirmability, to establish rigour. Hence, preparation of a manual of professional ethics, development of a career structure for nurses, setting standards of nursing education; nursing practice, and issuing guidelines for registration and licensing would further enhance the population health perspectives [28-31].

Credibility relates to the number of activities the researcher applies to enhance construction of credible findings [1]. In other words, the researcher follows certain strategies to ensure accuracy of interpretation and true reflection of participant experiences. According to Sandelowski [27], a study is considered credible when the researcher describes and interprets the lived experience as perceived by participants. Also, a study is considered credible when the participant experience can be recognised by readers immediately and after reading, they have an insight to the study. Credibility of this study was enhanced in three ways. First, the researcher gave participants the option of receiving either the interview transcript or final report and discuss the content with the researcher. This strategy helps participants identify whether qualitative data reflects their experience and confirm that the transcript represents their experience. Streubert and Carpenter [1] emphasise the importance of participant checking of data when there is a large pool of information, as this step supports truth and consistency of findings. Second, the researcher incorporated the Braun and Clarke [32] thematic data analysis framework and Gadamerian hermeneutic cycle for data analysis and interpretation. Thematic analysis directed the researcher to move back and forth between the data source and procedure of data collection to ensure coherence in findings. Similarly, the hermeneutic cycle allowed the researcher to move within the data from whole to parts and from parts to whole [16]. This process was applied to check that parts of the data, the codes, subthemes and themes, are representative for all participants for the experience. This process is comprehensively explained in the analysis and interpretation chapters. Third, the research supervisors checked the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation along with the researcher throughout the research process.

Applicability refers to study findings fitting the context of similar studies [27]. According to Sandelowski [27], study findings are considered applicable first, when recruited participants appropriately represent the group experiencing the phenomena under investigation; second, when the lived experience is presented as told by participants without reduction, and; third, when readers from a similar context perceive the research findings as meaningful and applicable to their experience. To enhance applicability in this study, the researcher provided extensive and detailed information

about the cardiology clinical setting, the nature of nursing clinical skills and knowledge required, and accessibility of online CPD in this setting. Also, the researcher clearly stated inclusion and exclusion criteria for study participants. The researcher should provide an adequate description of the study context to allow other researchers and readers to reach as close to the same conclusion as possible. Another way to enhance applicability used by the researcher in this study was through transparency of data that presented the experience. This was achieved by including typical and atypical data drawn from the participant experience in data analysis and interpretation. Furthermore, the researcher's goal while achieving applicability is to ensure that the same themes emerging from this study can be applicable to similar settings and individuals.

Auditability and consistency are synonyms in qualitative research [27]. Consistency of data aids study dependability. Furthermore, the researcher should show that the study is dependable through consistency of findings [1]. In this study, the researcher enhanced auditability by assuring that similar open-ended questions were used in the interview and the analysis and interpretation process was constant for all the participants.

Reliability in quantitative research aims to enhance generalisation of findings, whereas in qualitative research the researcher aims to describe human experience. Therefore, it is imperative in this study that the researcher provides a clear and congruent description of how findings were made and interpretation was constructed. The researcher used a systematic process in data analysis and interpretation. Further illustration is provided in the analysis, findings and interpretation chapters. Sandelowski [27] emphasised that a decision trail should be clear for readers and other researchers to enhance auditability of the study.

Confirmability is demonstrated in the research process by ensuring conclusions are free from bias [27]. In other word, the findings of the study truly reflect the participants' experience without the researcher influence by her own assumptions. Confirmability is achieved when the researcher clearly states the steps of qualitative inquiry to interpretation of the findings [33]. The study achieved confirmability when other measures of rigour mentioned above were achieved. Furthermore, confirmability refers to of the research process, rather than due to actions of the researcher. The researcher establishes confirmability via detailed explanations of the data analysis process for the reader and participants, which is illustrated in analysis, findings and interpretation chapters. In addition, the researcher presents the development of each theme and a sample of an interview transcript within the text and in the appendices to enhance trustworthiness.

Constructivism and interpretivism are interrelated theoretical perspectives on which hermeneutic phenomenological research is based. As stated by Schwandt [34] both terms refer to the assumption that the meaning of the lived world is constructed, rather than discovered. Interaction of the subject with the world may create different meanings for the same phenomena.

However, these meanings remain valid to reveal the essence of that experience. Therefore, based on the theoretical perspective of hermeneutic phenomenological research, the researcher assumptions include: Researcher preunderstanding of the topic contributes to constructing the interpretation and discussion, The meaning of using online CPD in advancing cardiology nursing practice is disclosed through interpreting description of the experience, The unstructured interview used for data collections reveals the participant experience and inductively explored the nurse experience of using online CPD in advancing their cardiology nursing practice, The interpretation of findings reflects the participant experience of clinical based learning, and As the researcher's background is cardiology nursing, pre-conceptions about online CPD outcomes in advancing nursing practice may be compatible with the participant experience.

Conclusion

This manuscript provides an understanding of development of the hermeneutic phenomenological approach. This approach helps to explore the RN experience using online CPD to enhance their nursing clinical practice in the cardiology setting.

Phenomenological research is the most suitable approach for exploring and further understanding of human experiences and other human phenomena. The hermeneutic interpretive approach allowed the researcher to reveal the deeper meanings of the online CPD experience.

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