

Research Terminology

The systematic, rigorous investigation of a situation or problem in order to generate new knowledge or validate existing knowledge. Research in health care takes place in a variety of areas and has many potential benefits; the areas include professional practice, environmental issues affecting health, vitality, treatments, theory development, health care economics, and many others. Health care research can be conducted by one group of professionals for generation of knowledge specific to that group, or by a diverse group of researchers collaborating on a given health care problem.

Applied research: scientific investigations conducted to answer specific clinical questions or solve practice-related problems.

Basic research: scientific investigation that involves the generation of new knowledge or development of new theories; its results often cannot be applied directly to specific clinical situations.

Correlational research: the systematic investigation of relationships among two or more variables, without necessarily determining cause and effect.

Descriptive research: research that provides an accurate portrayal of characteristics of a particular individual, situation, or group. These studies are a means of discovering new meaning, describing what exists, determining the frequency with which something occurs, and categorizing information.

Ethnographic research: the investigation of a culture through an in-depth study of the members of the culture; it involves the systematic collection, description, and analysis of data for development of theories of cultural behavior.

Experimental research: objective, systematic, controlled investigation for the purpose of predicting and controlling phenomena and examining probability and causality among selected variables.

Exploratory research: studies that are merely formative, for the purpose of gaining new insights, discovering new ideas, and increasing knowledge of phenomena.

Grounded theory research: a research approach designed to discover what problems exist in a given social environment and how the persons involved handle them; it involves formulation, testing, and reformulation of propositions until a theory is developed.

Historical research: research involving analysis of events that occurred in the remote or recent past.

Phenomenological research: an inductive, descriptive research approach developed from phenomenological philosophy; its aim is to describe an experience as it is actually lived by the person.

Qualitative research: research dealing with phenomena that are difficult or impossible to quantify mathematically, such as beliefs, meanings, attributes, and symbols; it may involve content ANALYSIS.

Quantitative research: research involving formal, objective information about the world, with mathematical quantification; it can be used to describe test relationships and to examine cause and effect relationships.