This research uses a qualitative methodology to examine and discuss the phenomenon of being a delivery suite co-ordinator. Qualitative research, although not credited with the same importance as quantitative research, does provide important rich data that can reveal contextual aspects of areas examined in ways that quantitative findings cannot do. Many midwifery research projects have used qualitative methodologies, so it is imperative that you learn how to read, interpret and evaluate the published studies using this approach. This study uses a phenomenological approach.

A phenomenological study is about ‘being’: it is essentially the enquiry into the lived experience of the ‘life world’ (van Manen 1990). It is therefore not about concepts, ideas or theories or about problem solving. A phenomenological study uncovers meaning within lived experience. It attempts to translate into words the felt understanding of an experience by getting as close to it as possible. This study is focused on describing the lived experience of being a labour ward co-ordinator or delivery suite charge midwife and how that appears. The authors of this study used an interpretive phenomenological, hermeneutic approach. Let’s break this down further.

**Interpretative methodology**

Interpretive methods are when the participants (in this case the interviewed labour ward co-ordinators) provide their own interpretations by describing their experiences of working in this role. The researchers of this study transcribed the in-depth interviews and examined the possible meanings of those experiences by exploring the data through a process of writing and rewriting. In this way the researchers attempted to bring to light the meanings as the labour ward co-ordinators lived them in their everyday existence, peering if you like into their ‘life world’. This methodology does not seek to generalise meanings but to bring to a textual meaning the lived experience of the ‘being a labour ward co-ordinator’ of those interviewed.

Hermeneutics is a paradigm about interpretation. It uncovers meaning and understanding. This meaning is dependent on the context, the situatedness of both the researchers and the midwives studied. A hermeneutic approach interprets things as they emerge from hidden layers that are often obscured from our conscious awareness. Hermeneutic phenomenology is therefore concerned with the life world of the lived experience and focuses on the detail that may seem trivial and taken for granted, in order to create meaning and achieve a sense of understanding of a phenomenon (Laverty 2003).

In studies of this nature it is important to establish the philosophical underpinning that provides a template for the discussion of the research findings. In this study the work of philosopher Martin Heidegger is identified and is used through the findings and discussion sections of the paper (Heidegger 1927/1962). This philosophical foundation provides the research with a structured way to organise the findings and discussion in a way that provides consistency to the reader. It also informs and guides the questions asked in the interviews and the interpretations and understandings that are revealed in a phenomenological project of this kind (Caelli 2001). As the philosophical notion underpinning the project is embedded in the inquiry process it is important that it is identified in published papers of this genre.

**The research**

Using aspects of Weston et al (2001) critical appraisal of qualitative research papers, let’s examine this published research.

• **Was this an important issue?** Was the research question clearly defined?

Yes, this study seeks to reveal the experiences of labour ward co-ordinators in tertiary hospital settings. Although the research question is not presented as a question, the intention is set forth within a phenomenological theoretical framework.

• **Is this question best answered from a qualitative approach?**

Yes, qualitative data was required. In order to bring meaning and understanding to the enquiry, in-depth interviews and interpretation were required. Sensitive areas could be accessed through this approach that could not be gained via quantitative approaches.

• **Is the context and setting clear for the research?** How were participants selected? Was the strategy justified?

Purposeful sampling was employed to...
Reading, evaluating and interpreting phenomenological research

recruit five experienced co-ordinators. This is a phenomenological project so the real life experience of the phenomenon under study needed direct exploration with those living in that world. The context and setting is very explicit in the article. The strategy is justified as experienced co-ordinators’ stories were sought in order to provide the data required for interpretation. The way they were recruited is not, however, explicit in the published paper.

- Were the researcher’s perspective, beliefs, experiences and background made explicit and addressed? Yes. Pivotal to the phenomenological research approach is the concept of identifying pre-understandings. In hermeneutics it is suggested that identifying prejudices and historical understandings that will influence interpretations is important. Konner (1994) recognised the need of first telling our own story. In this paper the primary researcher was interviewed by the two supervisors of the study. That interview was transcribed by the primary researcher who analysed and interpreted the transcript, addressing and being mindful of assumptions before starting the interviews with the midwife co-ordinators. A reflective diary was also kept in order to keep ‘true to the methodology’ (p8). This also provides a good paper trail as the study proceeds. A process termed the ‘hermeneutic circle’ is part of a study of this nature in which the researcher is moving to and from their own understandings and what they want or seek to understand (Heidegger 1927/1962).

- What were the data collection methods and are they described in detail? It is important in qualitative research published papers that this is addressed fully. The data were collected by individual in-depth interviews of up to 90 minutes each. The process of the interview itself is not published except that they were encouraged to tell stories of their lived experiences. The experience of the interviewer is not explicit although the two co-authors are both post-doctoral academics, one of whom is known to specialise in this form of enqury and is widely published in the area of hermeneutics.

- How were the data analysed? The data were analysed using the process of phenomenological reduction. This involves crafting the stories from the transcripts, which could be seen as polishing the stories into cohesive data sets. These crafted stories were then agreed with participants, analysed by the researcher and themes emerged as the researcher moved deeper into the stories through writing and re-writing. This process is one of moving back and forth between the parts and the whole. The process of interpretation brought insights that were then presented in the findings and discussion part of the paper using the philosophical underpinning as identified above.

- Was validity tested? Were the results tested for reliability? Are the results credible? Is validity and reliability of importance in a qualitative research paper of this nature? Perhaps not, but different approaches are required to ensure scientific rigour and the trustworthiness of the research (Sandelowski 1986). Establishing trustworthiness in qualitative papers such as this is therefore vital (Crowther 2006). The criteria for establishing trustworthiness according to Guba and Lincoln (1989), can be made up of four elements:
  1. Credibility – All five of the participants are clearly identified although anonymised. The credentials of the authors are provided at the start of the paper. When reading the lived experiences of the co-ordinators I immediately identified and recognised what was being said. This is sometimes referred to as the phenomenological nod or ‘oh yes’ moment when what is revealed ‘means something to you’, the reader.
  2. Generalisability and transferability - This paper does not attempt to provide the representativeness in the quantitative sense of large numbers of participants. However, it provides a glimpse into the real world of labour-ward co-ordinators’ lived experiences. The explanation of the philosophical underpinnings and theoretical framework for the study help determine whether the findings can be transferred to other settings. This study was done in New Zealand but on reading the paper I felt that the findings were easily transferable to other Western labour ward co-ordinators and resonated with me and my own personal work as a co-ordinator many years ago and those I have worked with since, both in the UK and in New Zealand.
  3. Dependability – The study has credibility therefore it is dependable; however this would have been improved if the interview formats and presentation of the ongoing analysis had been provided. Only a few examples of transcripts were given in the published paper which leaves the reader wondering what was not reported.
  4. Confirmability – As with all published qualitative research it is hard to confirm the interpretation of the data without access to the full data set. It is important that any results can be traced back to the raw data and its original analysis. The details of the researchers are provided and it would therefore be possible to access the full study.

- Are the results clinically important? Are the conclusions justified? As stated above the findings and discussion in this paper speak to us of a common situation experienced by labour ward co-ordinators. This has not been studied before and provides insights to this group of maternity care workers who are pivotal to the smooth running of busy tertiary units. The paper presents several recommendations. For example, the unpredictability of workloads on delivery suites needs to be addressed in terms of...
Another suggestion is that the skills of a co-ordinator and the support required need to be clearly identified, for the role of the labour ward midwife co-ordinator to be sustainable and manageable long term. The authors conclude that access to professional support is required within the contractual arrangements of these roles.

In the increasing acuity of our tertiary birthing suites, this paper provides voice to those not heard before in the literature. Giving voice to these midwives who act as the hub in busy centres leads to an increased awareness and understanding of their lived everyday experience. The authors are justified in suggesting development of strategies that facilitate clinical governance on our busy tertiary birthing units. The authors finally conclude that despite the frequent challenges and difficulties inherent in these roles the intention to provide the safest and best care to mothers and babies was highlighted in the stories of the labour ward co-ordinators in this study.

Conclusion
This was an appraisal of an interpretive phenomenological hermeneutic study. By its very nature this type of project is dependent on the subjective experiences of the researchers and the participants; it is also a methodology that is continually evolving (Laverty 2003). Such an enquiry aims at helping us to become more fully aware of our humanness. This research unwrapped article is a suggestion of a template to explore this type of a published qualitative study. The critique of this study does not pretend to address all the aspects of appraising qualitative research.

To close I provide two quotations from the paper, these are the voices of the labour ward co-ordinators revealing the busyness, lack of control as things arise without warning and the ability to multi-task: ‘...part of me always remains in the centre of the storm even though there may be times when I am weaving in and out of the storm with everybody around me moving too’ (p.9).

‘When I have enough staff to cope with everything I enjoy co-ordinating. The times I don’t enjoy it is when you know there is absolutely nothing, nothing, nothing left and if one more thing comes through the door it would tip you over the edge. I hate those times because I’m frightened that something awful is going to happen because there is no one, absolutely no one to care for the woman’ (p.10).

This is a rich insightful interpretive phenomenological, hermeneutic research paper that is worthwhile reading for those concerned with clinical governance and how contemporary labour wards function in our tertiary hospitals. TPM

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References