How medical teachers use stories to teach medical students: an observational study

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The topic of the project is how teachers use stories in medical undergraduate teaching. I hope to develop and test a ‘theory’ that helps to explain how stories might be used to facilitate learning. The theoretical perspective is narrative learning theory – the idea that the frames of meaning within which learning occurs are constructions which grow out of our impulse to emplot or thematise our lives (Hopkins, 1994).

Research questions:
Main:
How do medical teachers use stories in teaching medical students?
Subsidiary:
1 What categories (types) of stories do medical teachers use in teaching students?
2 What contextual features of telling stories might influence their impact on learning?
3 How might teachers’ use of these different types of story facilitate student learning?

Methodological approach
I intend to use a flexible, qualitative design, with grounded theory as the basis for sampling, data collection and analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). I plan to analyse unstructured narrative observations of teaching sessions with field notes and transcripts of audio recordings to develop the typology. In addition I will carry out interviews with teachers on their views of their use of stories, benefits in learning, and contextual factors, as well as exploring their views on my developing framework. I will use focus group interviews with students from the lectures I have observed, to explore with them their perspectives on how storytelling might influence their own learning. I will explore how different story categories and contextual factors might have an impact.

Questions for audience
1. Are there other methodological approaches I should consider in answering my research questions?
2. I would appreciate suggestions and guidance on how to conduct the interviews with teachers and students in order to help answer my research questions.

References