

Elicit 'Rich Data' with 'Rich Pictures': An Example Exploring Palliative Care Learning in Rural Canada

Keely King BA (Hons); Frances Kilbertus MD, CCFP(PC), MMedEd; Susan Robinson PHCNP, MScCAM, CHPCN(C); Sayra Cristancho PhD; Sarah Burm PhD

Rich pictures is a visual research method, originating from systems engineering, used to explore complexity and how contextual influences are perceived.^{1,2,3} In healthcare, rich pictures have been used to explore narratives of complex clinical situations.^{2,3,4} During a rich pictures session, participants are invited to draw their perception of a situation with all interacting components: things, ideas, people, feelings, beliefs, and conflicts.^{1,3,5}

Why Use Rich Pictures?

While verbal descriptions can be limited to one or few aspects of an experience, visual descriptions can capture multiple and evolving facets of complex situations.² Through the combination of verbal and visual inquiry, a broader view of an experience can be fostered by reflecting on personal, social and organizational contexts, in addition to technical aspects.⁴ Visual descriptions, often metaphorical, can be helpful in conveying thoughts, emotions, beliefs, and unconscious ideas, thus creating the potential for revealing more intimate, less sanctioned, and tacit dimensions of experience.^{3,5} Using rich pictures can support reflection, invite holistic and integrated understandings of experience, and illuminate participant voices through their choices of visual representations and descriptions thereof.^{4,5}

How to Draw a Rich Picture

Represent *everything* you know about the situation as you experienced it, including yourself. Try to recall all the interests and activities that occurred—yours and others.

Make sure there is plenty of activity in your picture—what are you and others *doing*? Show some of their context—*where* is this happening?

Use colour & metaphor. Show connections & relationships—you can use physical proximity (or distance), or representations of the nature of the connection (hearts, swords drawn, etc.).¹

Rich Picture Guidelines

Consider drawing yourself in the picture. This may be a good place to start. Draw yourself doing what you did in the situation, what you thought, how you felt, what you observed, etc.

Refrain from structure. Represent the situation as you experienced it without organizing, interpreting or analyzing.

Avoid using too many words. Limit word use to simple labels (ex: “hospital”), or speech bubbles (ex: “Aaagh!”, “Help!”).

Incorporate relevant observations about culture, emotions and values. These are important elements and their consideration helps us think deeply about a situation.

Integrate other points of view. Consider the perspectives of others in the situation and how they inform your understanding of the experience.¹

Our participant-created 'rich pictures' depict many complex and emotional experiences in vivid but simple drawings.



A 'rich picture' drawn by a nurse describing one of her first palliative care experiences. A complex set of interconnected issues, relationships, and memorable moments are brought together in this pictorial representation.

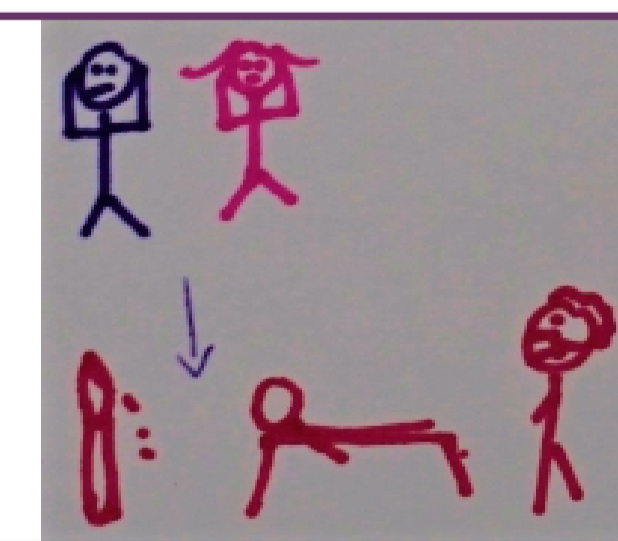
A physician probes the complexities of decision-making while sharing a personal experience of losing a loved one.



A physician recounts the decision of a woman with cancer to forego disease interventions and to live at home for as long as possible.



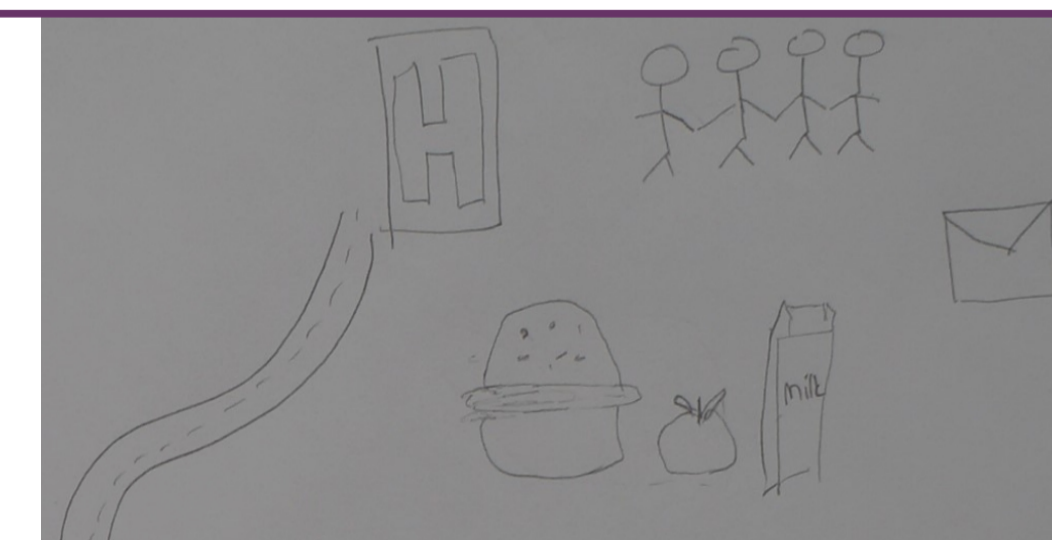
A physician describes family members' refusal to consider that foregoing surgery might be an option for their loved one.



A physician depicts an urban academic expounding on how to provide palliative care, but explains that care options depend on context.



A physician describes some of the challenges her patient and his wife faced due to their rural residency.



A depiction of rural transportation challenges that make buying groceries, socializing and attending medical appointments difficult.

Rich Pictures as a Research Method

Rich pictures is a valuable research tool in medical education where learning occurs in complex and multi-factorial contexts.⁴ This method is valuable in understanding medical expert judgment and conceptualizations of complex, challenging situations.⁵

Rich pictures can be used to elicit participant narratives in combination with semi-structured interviews. Participants are invited to draw their experience and the drawing is used as a starting point for conversation. This combination may overcome some of the limitations of the interview method: the difficulty of making the tacit explicit, the tendency to simplify descriptions of complex situations, the tendency to focus on the procedural dimensions of a situation, and verbalization barriers.⁵

Our Study: Rural Palliative Care Learning

Palliative care is complex, challenging and emotional, more-so in rural contexts with limited resources, broad scopes of practice, and relationships entangled across personal-professional barriers. **The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of palliative care learning for providers in low-resourced rural environments in order to improve education and support for future rural healthcare providers.** Research participants were invited to tell their stories of memorable learning in both verbal visual forms: after creating a rich picture, a semi-structured interview proceeded with an appreciation of how the narrators chose to tell their stories.

What Our Participants Said about Rich Pictures

“It is a great tool to use for situations that are stressful... I can break it down now and understand it in a different, non-personal, more objective way.”
- Participant 7

“It was good for giving me some perspective about really how many different elements were in play and how much was really going on... you don't really realize how complicated or how involved everything is until you start sort of mapping it out.”
- Participant 2

“It's a different way of experiencing... I'm wondering: should I reflect and draw everything?... Even some things that I might not have thought about... came into my brain while I was drawing”
- Participant 9

Literature Cited

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