

Learning to Read Research

by Mark LaRocca-Pitts PhD BCC

"Research!" Oh, no. Caught again.

"Research?" What? Are you speaking to me? Where do I begin?

"Research." Yes, thank you. Anything else?

Though the word itself doesn't change, how we hear it and understand it varies among all of us. For some, the mention of *research* carries a homiletical force, much like a fire and brimstone preacher's "Repent!" We hear it and a feeling of being judged and potentially found inadequate descends upon our souls. And why shouldn't some of us feel this way? For years, we chaplains have been preached at to read and do our own research.

For most of us when we hear the word *research*, an alligator-infested quagmire of questions swamps us. We would like to do it, but we are not sure what *it* is and we have no clear path of entry. Our minds race: "Does this mean reading research or actually doing research? And those distinctions, what were they again ... qualitative and quantitative? Which of them do you mean?"

For a blessed few, hearing the word *research* soothes our souls like the legendary balm of Gilead. We are familiar with the literature, we know how to read it, and we are actually doing some of it. We are able to include in casual conversations such concepts as "evidence-based" and "best practices," and on our better days, can speak intelligently of "statistically significant data" and "my null hypothesis." A sense of inadequacy only occasionally overtakes us, and most of our questions flow out of our research as opposed to blocking our entry into research.

Personally, I waffle among these three camps. But with some hard work and a little grace, I am finding myself more often than not in that third camp near Gilead. In order for us to become that "research-informed profession" of which George Fitchett spoke most eloquently and passionately at Summit '09 in Florida this past February, we need to increase our comfort level in all things related to research. One place to begin is learning how to read research.

In the Reading Room of the APC Web site under "Research/Studies," you will find a [Step-by-Step Guide to Reading Research Articles](#). This simple guide suggests one way to read research and a diagram illustrating the relationships among the various types of research. Before we become a "research-doing profession," we need to become a "research-informed profession." That will occur only as we learn how to read research. My hope is that what follows will provide a place for us to begin.

Mark LaRocca-Pitts PhD BCC is on staff at Athens Regional Medical Center in Athens, GA. He serves on the APC History Committee and the APC Commission on Quality in Pastoral Services and can be contacted at marklp@armc.org.

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