This is a question we get asked all the time so we wanted to develop a simple answer. Drawing on great work from Canada [[1]](https://kristinastaley.com/2019/02/25/how-is-involvement-in-research-different-from-qualitative-research/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn1) and on many helpful comments from reviewers, we have written a short list of what we see as the main differences between qualitative research and involvement. This table is more of a prompt to stimulate thought and discussion, rather than a definitive guide.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Qualitative research project** | **Involvement in a research project** |
|  **Research question** | Aims to answer a research question | Aims to help select and refine a research question |
|  **Practical approach** | Follows a chosen method based on theory | Researchers and patients/public exchange views in a way that suits both |
| **People involved** | Seeks views from a defined sample | Seeks a range of perspectives from people with diverse experiences |
|  **Ethical approval** | Requires ethical approval | Needs to reflect ethical practice but does not normally need ethical approval [2] |
|  **People’s input** | Seeks people’s input as data to answer a research question | Seeks people’s input to inform and influence decisions about how research is designed, undertaken and disseminated |
|  **Power**  | Only researchers have the power to make decisions about how the project is run | Patients, the public and researchers share power to make joint decisions about how the project is run, based on their combined views |
|  **Use of findings** | Generates findings that may have wider application  | Generates insight and learning that may be specific to the researchers and patients/public involved and their particular project |

**Bec Hanley, Kristina Staley, Derek Stewart, Rosemary Barber, August 2019**

**References**

[[1]](https://kristinastaley.com/2019/02/25/how-is-involvement-in-research-different-from-qualitative-research/#_ftnref1) Doria et al. (2018) Sharpening the focus: differentiating between focus groups for patient engagement vs. qualitative research. Research Involvement and Engagement, 4:19.[2] Health Research Authority Best Practice Guidance on Public Involvement: (2019) [www.hra.nhs.uk/planning-and-improving-research/best-practice/public-involvement/what-do-i-need-do/](http://www.hra.nhs.uk/planning-and-improving-research/best-practice/public-involvement/what-do-i-need-do/)