Applications of Phenomenology: 
Retrospective Analysis of Lived Experience of Eye Disease

Berry Fund for Public Philosophy (amount requested $1,000)

Project Members

- Dr. Jay Chhablani (PI)
- Kimberly Tucker (Co-PI)
- Dr. Lanei Rodemeyer (Key Personnel, Faculty Advisor)

Summary of Project

The funding requested will aid in the implementation of a new pilot-study that assesses: (1) the lived experience of eye disease, as well as (2) the application of phenomenology in medical research. We have developed a methodology that incorporates phenomenological methods into the structure of the study itself, and which go beyond traditional qualitative-interview approaches given its focus on an embodied understanding of the human being (see attached IRB protocol for a full description of the methodology). The study involves a questionnaire that will be administered to patients from the UPMC Eye Center in Pittsburgh. The data from the pilot study will be used to secure other grants that will allow us to conduct additional studies that employ this new phenomenologically-informed approach in order to further our understanding of the challenges that patients with vision disability face. The PI of the project, Jay Chhablani, associated with the UPMC Eye Center has successfully secured grants in the past from NIH, as well as other sponsors, and we are confident in securing additional funding once the pilot study is complete.

Description How Funds Would Be Spent

Funds will be used to cover labor costs carried out by the co-investigator of the pilot study, Kimberly Tucker. These hourly wages would include the following research activities: conducting interviews, transcribing and note-taking after interviews, data analysis.

Budget

- 9 interviews conducted (10 hours total) x $25/hr = $250
- 6 interviews transcribed (30 hours total) x $25/hr = $750

Summary of Research Activities

- Interviews — 9 interviews were conducted (between 45 mins–1 hour) on zoom with patients from UPMC Eye Center in Pittsburgh with Central Serous Retinopathy.

- Transcriptions — 6 of 9 interviews were transcribed using the recorded zoom sessions. We ultimately decided to only use 6 of the interviews for data analysis.

- Preliminary data analysis phase I— Extensive notes and preliminary analysis were completed on the 6 transcribed interviews. Three essential themes were derived from the interview responses, which have been analyzed by Co-PI Kimberly T. (the analyses appears in chapters
Data analysis phase II — We are now entering into the data analysis phase of the pilot study. We are conducting data analysis using the descriptive phenomenological method, which is a type of thematic analysis that draws out essential themes from interview responses and analyzes them according to phenomenological concepts. One of the dominant themes that has emerged in the study has been the disruptions to the habitual body. This dominant theme is being analyzed according to Edmund Husserl’s conception of embodiment.

APA public philosophy initiative — the pilot study meets the goals of the APAs initiative for promoting the public use of philosophy insofar as it explores ways that classical texts in phenomenology can be adapted to qualitative research methodologies. We aim is to continue exploring how phenomenology can be used in qualitative research by proposing new studies based on the results of the pilot.

Future projects that promote public philosophy — A grant proposal has been submitted to the Samuel and Emma Winters Foundation for the Biomedical Research Grant (University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine) (amount requested $10,000) to conduct a follow-up study inspired by the phenomenological descriptive approach used in the pilot study. The objective of the newly proposed study, “‘Lived experience’ as a component of vision-related quality of life instruments: Applications of phenomenology in clinical research,” is to incorporate the phenomenological descriptive method used in the pilot study to analyze lived descriptions in QOL surveys—specifically patients with Central Serous Chorioretinopathy (CSR), a disease prototype of an eye disease. The goal is to give the modified version of the QOL survey to CSR patients before and after photodynamic therapy (PDT), a treatment approach, to determine how the treatment impacted QOL. A secondary aim is to determine whether new categories need to be added to these assessment tools to further expand on the definition of low vision quality of life.