Primary Care First Patient Experience of Care Survey (CAHPS® with PCF supplemental items) General Guidelines for Telephone Interviewing

OVERVIEW

The Primary Care First Patient Experience of Care Survey (PCF PECS) is administered as an electronic system telephone interview for nonrespondents to the mail survey. As a telephone interviewer on the PCF PECS, you will use the system to conduct each interview. The questions you ask are programmed into a computer. The phone number is provided by the computer for you to make the call. You will read the questions from the computer screen and enter the answer to each question into the computer. Based on the answer you enter, the computer will automatically take you to a screen with the next applicable question.

You play an extremely important role in the overall success of this study. You are the link to the hundreds of respondents who will provide valuable information to the project team. You are the person who develops rapport with the respondents, assures them that their participation is important, and obtains their full cooperation and informed consent.

As a professional interviewer, your job is to help each respondent feel at ease and comfortable with the interview. Key to accomplishing this goal is to be fully informed about the survey, the interview, and the data collection procedures.

GENERAL INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES

The process of asking questions, probing, and entering responses correctly is crucial to obtaining high-quality data for the PCF PECS. General techniques and procedures you should follow when conducting the PCF PECS interviews are provided below.

Administering Survey Questions

- Ask the questions <u>exactly</u> as they are presented. Do <u>not</u> change the wording or condense any question when reading it to the respondent.
- Emphasize all words or phrases that appear in **bold,** *italics*, or <u>underline</u>.
- Text in (parentheses) can be read if necessary or skipped if not necessary.
- DON'T KNOW (DK) or REFUSED (REF) are valid response options for each question, however these options must not be read aloud or volunteered.
- Ask every question specified, even when a respondent has seemingly provided the answer as part of the response to a preceding question. The answer received in the context of one

question may not be the same answer that will be received when the other question is asked. If it becomes cumbersome to the respondent, remind him or her gently that you must ask all questions of all respondents.

- If the answer to a question indicates that the respondent did not understand the intent of the question, or if the respondent requests that any part of the question be clarified, even if it is only one word, repeat the question.

- Read the questions slowly, at a pace that allows them to be readily understood. Remember that the respondent has not heard these questions before and will not have had the exposure that you have had to the questionnaire.

- Transition statements are designed to inform the respondent of the nature of an upcoming question or a series of questions, to define a word, or to describe what is being asked for in the question. Read transition statements just as they are presented. Don't create "transition statements" of your own, because these may unintentionally introduce bias into the interview. The exception to this is when transitioning from a set of questions with a scale to yes/no questions, like Q28. If sample respondents want to continue answering with the scale in these instances, you can add the transition statement "Would you say yes or no?" after reading the question.

- Give the respondent plenty of time to recall past events.

- Do not suggest answers to the respondent. Your job as an interviewer is to read the questions exactly as they are printed, make sure the respondent understands the question, and then enter the responses. Do not help the respondent answer the questions.

- Ask questions in the exact order in which they are presented.

- Do not read words that appear in ALL CAPITAL LETTERS to the respondent. This includes both questions and response categories. These are instructions for the interviewers or response options that should not be offered as choice, but chosen if answered as such by the respondent.

- Read all questions including those which may appear to be sensitive to the respondent in the same manner with no hesitation or change in inflection.

- Thoroughly familiarize yourself with the Frequently Asked Questions list before you conduct interviews so that you are knowledgeable about the PCF PECS.

- At the end of the interview, tell the sample member that the survey is completed and thank him or her for taking part in the survey.

Introducing the Survey

The introduction is of the utmost importance to successfully completing a telephone interview. Most people hang up in the first few minutes of the interview, so if you can convince the respondent to remain on the line long enough to hear the purpose of the study and begin asking the questions, the chances that your respondent will complete the interview increase dramatically.

- When reading the introduction, sound confident and pronounce the words as clearly as you can.
- Respondents are typically not expecting survey research calls, so they may need your help to clarify the nature of the call.
- Practice the introduction until you can present it in such a manner that your presentation sounds **confident**, **sincere**, and **natural**.
- Deliver the introduction at a conversational pace. Rushing through the introduction gives an impression of lack of confidence and may also cause the listener to misunderstand.
- Try not to pause too long before asking the first question in the survey following the introduction. A pause tends to indicate that you are waiting for approval to continue.

Providing Neutral Positive Feedback

The use of neutral feedback can help build rapport with sample patients. Periodically acknowledging the respondent during the interview can help gain and retain cooperation during the interview.

Acceptable neutral acknowledgment words:

- Thank you
- All right
- Okay
- I understand
- Let me repeat the question

Avoiding Refusals

The first and most critical step in avoiding refusals is your effort to establish rapport with reluctant sample members, therefore minimizing the incidence of refusals. Remember, you will not be able to call back and convert a refusal—your initial contact with the sample member is the only chance you will have to create a successful interview. The following are some tips to follow to avoid refusals.

- Make sure you are mentally prepared when you start each call, and have a positive attitude.
- Treat respondents the way you would like to be treated.
- Always use an effective/positive/friendly tone and maintain a professional outlook.
- Pay careful attention to what the respondent says during the interview.
- Listen to the respondent completely rather than assuming you know what he or she is objecting to.
- Listen before evaluating and entering a response code.
- Be accommodating to the respondents' needs.
- Always remain in control of the interaction.
- Understand the reason for reluctance/refusal at the start of the call, or figure it out as quickly as possible.
- Listen as an ally, not an adversary, and do not debate or argue with the respondent.
- Be prepared to address one (or more) reason(s) for reluctance/refusal.
- Focus your comments to sample members on why they specifically are important to the study.
- Paraphrase what you hear and repeat this back to the respondent.
- Remember that you are a professional representative of your survey organization and the practice site whose patients you are contacting.

Types of Refusals

Refusals can be broken into three categories based on how firm the sample member was in refusing.

- Soft: Respondent may have said "No thank you" and hung up, or disengaged before interviewer could rebut or provide additional information.
- Hard: Respondent clearly stated they don't want to participate, asked to be removed from future studies, or said they don't do surveys in general.

- Hostile: Respondent was clearly upset, angry, and possibly got loud when asked to participate or upon answering the call.

GENERAL INTERVIEWING GUIDANCE

The following sections provide guidance on the use of probes, avoiding bias, and entering responses accurately. By following these rules, interviewers will help ensure that the PCF PECS interviews are conducted in a standardized manner.

Probing

At times, it will be necessary for you to probe to obtain a more complete or more specific answer from a respondent. To elicit an acceptable response, you will often need to use an appropriate neutral or nondirective probe. The important thing to remember is not to suggest answers or lead the respondent. Some general rules for probing follow.

- During the course of the survey, use of neutral probe words such as the following is permitted:
  - Re-reading the question
  - Re-reading the response options
  - What do you mean by that?
- Repeat the question if the respondent misunderstood or misinterpreted the question. After hearing the question the second time, the respondent will probably understand what information is expected.
- Repeat the answer choices if the respondent is having difficulty selecting a response option.
- Use a silent probe, which is pausing or hesitating to indicate to the respondent that you need additional or better information. This is a good probe to use after you have determined the respondent's response pattern.
- Use neutral questions or statements to encourage a respondent to select an answer choice. Examples of neutral probes include the following where the interviewer says:
  - "Take a minute to think about it." REPEAT QUESTION, IF APPROPRIATE
  - "Which would be closer?" REPEAT ANSWER CATEGORIES THAT ARE CLOSEST TO THE PATIENT'S RESPONSE

- Use clarification probes when the response is unclear, ambiguous, or contradictory. Be careful not to appear to challenge the respondent when clarifying a statement and always use a neutral probe. An example of a clarification probe is "So, would you say that it is…" REPEAT ANSWER CATEGORIES

- Encourage the respondent to give his or her best guess if a respondent gives a "don't know" response. Let the respondent know that this is not a test and there are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in the respondent's opinions and assessment of the care that he or she has received.

- If the respondent asks you to answer the question for him or her, let the respondent know that you cannot answer the question for him or her. Instead, ask the respondent if she or he requires clarification on the content or meaning of the question.

- Interviewers must not interpret survey questions for the patient. However, if the sample patient uses a word that clearly indicates yes/no, then the interviewer can accept those responses.

Avoiding Bias

One common pitfall of interviewing is unknowingly introducing bias into an interview. Bias occurs when an interviewer says or does something that affects the answers respondents give in an interview. An interview that has significant bias will not provide accurate data for the research being conducted; such an interview may have to be thrown out.

As a professional interviewer, remaining neutral at all times ensures that bias is not introduced into the interview. There are many things you can do or avoid to help ensure that no bias is introduced. You should

- read all statements and questions exactly as they are written,

- use neutral probes that do not suggest answers,

- <u>not</u> provide your own personal opinions or answers in an effort to "help" respondents, and

- <u>not</u> use body language, such as a cough or a yawn to influence the interview.

Taking these steps to monitor your own spoken and unspoken language will go a long way to guarantee that the interviews you conduct are completed correctly and efficiently.

Entering Responses

The majority of the questions you will ask have precoded responses. To enter a response for these types of questions, you will simply select the appropriate response option and enter the number corresponding to that response.

The conventions presented below must be followed at all times to ensure that the responses you enter accurately reflect the respondents' answers and to ensure that questionnaire data are all collected in the same systematic manner.

- You must listen to what the respondent says and enter the appropriate answer if the response satisfies the objective of the question. If the answer does not appear to satisfy the objective, repeat the question.
- In entering answers to open-ended questions or "Other (specify)" categories, enter the response verbatim, exactly as it was given by the respondent.
- Enter the response immediately after it is given.
- If a respondent gives a range in response to a question, probe as appropriate for a more specific answer. For example, if a respondent says, "Oh, 2 or 3 times" and you can enter only one number, ask for clarification: "Would that be closer to 2 or to 3?"

Rules for Successful Telephone Interviewing

Remember, the key to successful interviewing is being prepared for every contact that you make. Have a complete set of the appropriate materials at your work station, organized in such a manner that you do not have to stop and search for required documents. Some general rules that you should follow every time you place a call are provided below.

1. ***Be prepared before you place a call***. Be prepared to talk to the sample member. You should be able to explain the purpose of your call to the sample member or his or her family and friends. Do not rely on your memory alone to answer questions. Make sure you review and understand the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

2. ***Act professionally***. Convey to sample members that you are a professional who specializes in asking questions and conducting interviews. As a professional interviewer, you have specific tasks to accomplish for this survey.

3. ***Make the most of your contact.*** Even though you may not be able to obtain an interview on this call, it is important to make the most of the contact to aid in future attempts. For example, if you are trying to contact the sample member and he or she is not available, gain as much information as you can to help reach the sample member the next time he or she is called. Important questions to ask:

    - When is the sample member usually home?
    - What is the best time to reach the sample member?

- Can you schedule an “appointment” to reach the sample member at a later time?

4. ***<u>Don’t be too quick to code a sample member as incapable</u>***. Some sample members may be hard of hearing or appear not to fully understand you when you call. Rather than immediately coding these cases as “Incapable,” please attempt to set a call-back for a different time of day and different day of the week. It is possible that reaching the sample member at a different time may result in your being able to conduct the interview with him or her. Remember, **the use of proxy respondents is permitted. The proxy should be someone like a family member or friend who is familiar with the patient’s care.**

   For situations where the respondent is mentally or physically incapable, including those who are hearing impaired with no TTY service and a proxy is not available, you should code the case as Mentally or Physically Incapacitated.