

Background

- Children in foster care covered by Medicaid are more likely prescribed psychotropic medications than those not in foster care regardless of insurance plan.¹⁻³
- National organizations recommend states develop comprehensive psychotropic medication monitoring programs assessing efficacy and safety of psychotropic medications prescribed to these children.⁴
- Focus groups serve as a valuable tool in untangling the complexity of healthcare problems and provide insight to improving health care delivery.⁵⁻⁶
- Focus groups bring together participants who share a commonality and allow researchers to study interactions between them.⁵⁻⁶

Objective

- Understand the lived experiences, resources used, communication barriers, and collaboration among parties in the Oklahoma Foster Care (OFC) program.

Methods

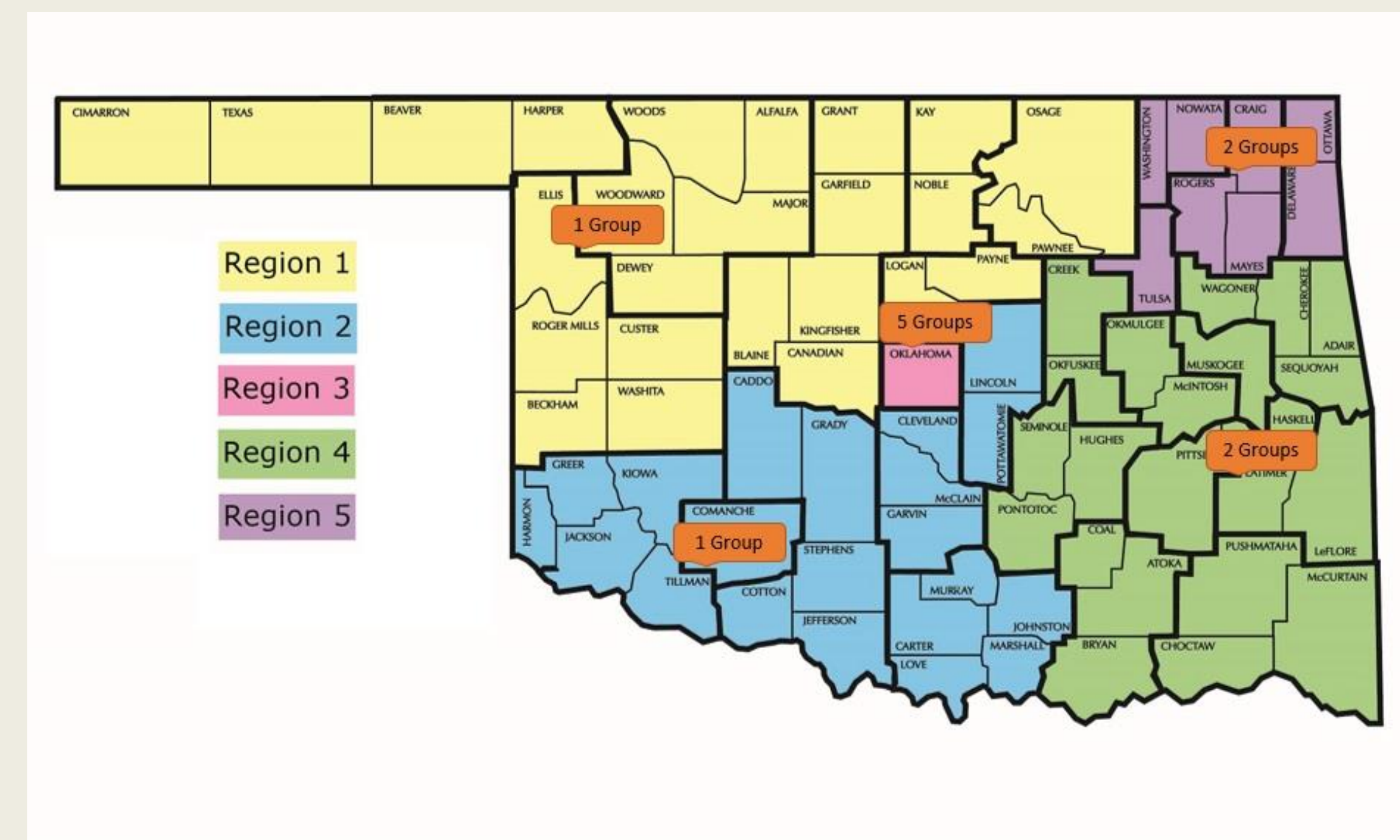
- Research team:** Stakeholders from Pharmacy Management Consultants (PMC), Oklahoma Health Care Authority (OHCA), and Oklahoma Department of Human Services (DHS)
- Study Design:** Qualitative focus groups consisting of participants in 4 important segments that work with OFC
- Segments:** Healthcare providers, child welfare staff, legal personnel, and foster families
- Recruitment:** Purposive sampling with the assistance of DHS staff serving as gatekeepers
- Incentives:** Full meal and gift card
- Execution:** Two research team members conducting focus groups, sessions audio recorded and transcribed
- Data Analysis:** Transcripts uploaded into ATLAS.ti® and analyzed using the constant comparative method

Focus Group Summary

Segment	Groups	N
Child Welfare Staff	3	27
Foster Parents	2	7
Healthcare Providers	4	23
Legal Professionals	2	15
Total	11	72

Prior Experience with Foster Care Before Current Job/Situation	Yes (%)	No (%)	N/A (%)
Child Welfare Staff (n=27)	6 (22.2%)	21 (77.8%)	0 (0%)
Foster Parents (n=7)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	7 (100%)
Healthcare Providers (n=23)	13 (56.5%)	8 (34.8%)	2 (8.7%)
Legal Professionals (n=15)	13 (86.7%)	2 (13.3%)	0 (0%)
Overall (n=72)	32 (44.4%)	31 (43.1%)	9 (12.5%)

Focus Group Locations



Results

- Lived Experience**
Perceptions and attitudes about psychotropic medications
- Excessive use of psych medications by OFC children
 - Use of medications instead of or before other alternatives
 - “Try everything else. Stop trying to do surgery for a scraped elbow.” [MC* in a DHS group]
 - Not allowing time to see if new medication regimen will work
 - Lack of monitoring guidelines
 - Development of additional health problems like diabetes, obesity, unknown future effects
 - Creating a culture where people automatically turn to medications
- Strengths of current medication use process**
- Dedication of members in other segments
 - Using a team approach increases consistency in care provided
 - When available, psychiatrists and other specialists are preferred
 - Access to nurses and mental health specialists within DHS
 - Initial training covers many important topic areas
 - Improvements have been made to increase communication
- Frustrations of current medication use process**
- Problems in families are often multi-generational
 - Lack of providers and foster families outside of metro areas
 - Long wait times to get appointments and evaluations
 - Travel time and distances can be burden – children missing school
 - Incomplete information sharing when child is transitioned
 - Too much focus on child’s behavior and not the root cause

- Information/Resource Access**
Helpful information sources
- Mental health providers
 - DHS nurses, supervisors, staff, and caseworkers
 - Foster care parents and support groups for families
 - Personal networks developed over time
 - Databases with medication information
- Information sources desired by participants**
- Access to medication history
 - Electronic case records with complete medical, social, educational history
 - Ability to call and talk to a person or a database with specific medication information, help decipher information
 - Healthcare professional in court for consultations

*Pseudonym used in place of real initials.

Results (Continued)

- Collaboration/Communication**
- Occurs between segments, but the process is often disjointed
 - Willingness to have regular meetings – in person, telephone conference calls, or video links
 - Easier when all team members know each other through established relationships and have mutual respect for each role on the team
 - Preferred method of communication depends on the situation and the location of the team members
 - Desire for more collaboration with pharmacists

Discussion/Limitations

- Some discussions had to be cut short due to time restriction (and one session cut short due to inclement weather).
- These results cannot be generalized to a broader population, but this is not the intention of qualitative research.
- This exploratory study helped identify current successes and problems in the OFC psychotropic medication use process that will inform improvements in quality of care for OFC children and future research in this area.

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Disclosure Statement

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