

Implementation of Focus Groups in a Collaborative Assessment of Medication Utilization in the Foster Care System

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Background

- Focus groups increasingly utilized by healthcare researchers to understand provider and patient perspectives
- Advantages of focus groups: open dialogue between participants, an ability to expand on answers after hearing others' comments, cost-effectiveness in collecting information from multiple people at once
- Oklahoma's Medicaid program overseen by the Oklahoma Health Care Authority (OHCA) and foster care program overseen by the Department of Human Services (DHS)
- Children in foster care covered by Medicaid more likely prescribed psychotropic medications¹⁻³
- National organizations recommend states develop comprehensive psychotropic medication monitoring programs assessing efficacy and safety⁴
- Potential to impact almost 10,000 children in Oklahoma foster care (OFC) program⁵

Objectives

- Develop a comprehensive psychiatric medication management system
- Understand lived experiences of parties in the OFC program to improve communication and resource access

Methods

- **Research team:** Stakeholders from Pharmacy Management Consultants (PMC), OHCA, and DHS
- **Study Design:** Qualitative focus groups consisting of participants in 5 important segments within OFC
- **Segments:** Inpatient hospital teams, outpatient providers, child welfare staff, legal personnel, and foster families
- **Coverage area:** Recruitment from each of the 5 DHS regions for geographical representation
- **Incentives:** Full meal and gift card
- **Execution:** Two research team members conducting focus groups within regions; sessions audio recorded and transcribed
- **Data Analysis:** Transcripts uploaded into ATLAS.ti® and analyzed using the constant comparative method

Focus Group Design

Focus Group Segments

- Inpatient Psychiatric Teams
- Outpatient Providers
- DHS Social Workers
- Legal System Professionals
- Foster Parents

Groups

- 3 - 4 groups per segment
- N = 15 - 20 groups

Participants

- 6 - 8 participants per group
- N = 90 - 160 participants

Discussion

- Not all research questions appropriately addressed through quantitative methods
- Understanding lived experiences of individuals addresses complexity of healthcare problems and provides insight to improve health care delivery⁵⁻⁶
- Focus groups bring together participants who share a commonality and allow researchers to study interactions between them
- Advantages over surveys: collect more specific information in greater depth, minimized confusion through clarification of questions, uses participants' own words, participants empowered to assume active role in program improvement

Implications

- Identification of current successes and problems in the OFC psychotropic medication use process
- Improvements to quality of care for OFC children
- Inform development of psychotropic medication monitoring programs

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Oklahoma DHS Regions

