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 medications5-3
- 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

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
- **Participants:** 6 - 8 participants per group, N = 90 - 160 participants
- **Groups:** 3 - 4 groups per segment, N = 15 - 20 groups
- **Inpatient Psychiatric Teams**
- **Outpatient Providers**
- **DHS Social Workers**
- **Legal System Professionals**
- **Foster Parents**

Oklahoma DHS Regions

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 delivery4-6
- 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

References

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