How to get survey responses from busy people

To what extent does the use of Microsoft Forms improve compliance when auditing medical on-call activity?

Jules Causton, Clinical Projects Manager, St Michael's Hospice and St Wilfrid's Hospice
David Barclay, Medical Director, St Michael's Hospice and St Wilfrid's Hospice
Louise Free, Associate Medical Director, St Wilfrid's Hospice
Isae Kilonzo, Consultant in Palliative Medicine, St Michael's Hospice

Background

We are two hospices collaborating on a project that requires a detailed picture of medical on-call activity. To capture this information we asked our doctors to complete a 12-week survey of on-call sessions.

Previous survey attempts had neither been popular nor provided enough responses to be meaningful. Speculating that clunky data entry methods - i.e. spreadsheets and paper forms - were to blame [1,2], we looked for a more clinician-friendly solution.

Aims

To improve on previous survey response rates by:

1) Lightening the "Response Burden" [1,2] with a user-friendly data entry method

2) Encouraging buy-in through engagement [3,4,5].

Method

Data entry

We chose Microsoft Forms as it best met our needs in terms of accessibility (it's web-based so you can get it on any device) and budget (it's free with Office 365).

We designed a questionnaire using "choice" questions to minimise typing, and the "branching" feature to make the navigation as streamlined as possible.

Engagement

We involved the doctors in the survey's entire journey, discussing goals, practicalities and question design. At the end of the survey we collected feedback via an evaluation questionnaire [4].

Results

- Improved response rates: 70% of on-call sessions logged (average results from previous audits were just 48%)

- Minimal response burden:
  - Average record entry time: 1.18 minutes
  - 38% completed in < 1 minute
  - 68% completed in < 2 minutes

- Positive user feedback:
  - 100% preferred Microsoft Forms for recording on-call activity [4].
  - 100% would recommend Microsoft Forms for future surveys [4].

Conclusion

Thanks to the improved response rates and positive user feedback, we are now using Microsoft Forms more widely to collect information and feedback.

But the success of a survey isn't all down to ease of data entry - engagement plays an equally important part.

And this is where we could improve. In the first month when the project was new and exciting, the response rate was close to 100% but dropped off as time went on. While we sent reminders and chocolate incentives from time to time, would a bit more creativity have maintained the honeymoon period for longer?

Next time we could try:
- Sharing real-time results with doctors
- Instigating a friendly competition
- Giving more prompts - despite 90% users saying there were enough reminders, the only reason cited for not completing the survey was "I forgot" [4]

"Great way of gathering information - will use this format for other things."

"Very easy to use, felt engaged from the onset."

"It was convenient to have the option to complete the audit on my phone."

Things we like about Microsoft Forms

- It's accessible to everyone with a Smartphone – put a link to the form on your home screen so it's always visible
- "Choice" questions mean respondents don't have to type and you also get consistent answers, making results easier to analyse
- The "branching" feature is great for ensuring the respondent is only presented with relevant questions based on their previous answers
- The "thank you" message is customisable so it can be changed regularly to encourage respondents to keep logging their data
- It integrates with Teams making it easy to collaborate on design and to share real-time results

And a bugbear

- Dates default to US format in the Excel spreadsheet where the responses are stored

What do you think of this poster? Scan the QR code to complete the survey!

References

1. Cunningham et al. Exploring physician specialist response rates to web-based surveys, BMC Medical Research Methodology (2015) 15:32
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3. Chenicheri Sid Nair, Phillip Adams & Patricie Mertova (2008) Student Engagement: The Key to Improving Survey Response Rates, Quality in Higher Education, 14:3, 225-232
4. Hospice On-call Survey User Feedback Questionnaire
5. Cook DA, Wittich CM, Daniels WL, West CP, Harris AM, Beebe TJ. Incentive and Reminder Strategies to Improve Response Rate for Internet-Based Physician Surveys: A Randomized Experiment. J Med Internet Res. 2016;18(9):e244. Published 2016 Sep 16.

Contact details
Jules Causton, Clinical Projects Manager
St Michael's Hospice, Hastings and Rother
Email: jcauston@stmichaelshospice.com