



FOCUS on Field Epidemiology

DEVELOPING A QUESTIONNAIRE: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Think about a foodborne outbreak in which a product from a local grocery store appears to be implicated. What kinds of questions would be most important to ask? In what order would you put the questions? What type of questions would you use?

Discussion Cues:

The CDC offers a “standard” questionnaire online to get you started in a foodborne outbreak. You will probably want to collect demographic information (which may be a combination of fill-in-the-blank and closed-ended questions) and information on clinical symptoms (for cases). You will also want information on visits to the implicated grocery store, including dates visited and items purchased. Additionally, you will need to ask about when the items purchased at the grocery store were eaten, focusing on the item(s) that you suspect are responsible for the outbreak.

If your department has recently conducted a foodborne outbreak investigation, ask those involved in the investigation to describe the outbreak, the questionnaire, and success in determining the cause of the outbreak. If the cause was determined, was the questionnaire instrumental in this? If the cause was not determined, do you think the right questions were asked in the right way on the questionnaire?

2. In the experience of the staff you work with, what particularly good or particularly bad questions have appeared on questionnaires? Was the wording vague or inappropriate? Was the translation true to the questions being asked? Did the skip patterns flow smoothly?

Discussion Cues:

Sometimes, problems with the wording of questions are not apparent until interviews take place, and problems with the wording of response choices on a questionnaire are not recognized until the data is being analyzed (particularly if the questionnaire was not pre-tested). Examples of good and bad questions are:

Bad: Have you been evaluated for hypertension? (This is too technical.)

Good: Has a physician or other health care provider measured your blood pressure to determine if you have high blood pressure?

Bad: Childhood immunizations are important ways parents can protect their children against serious diseases. Has your child been immunized against measles? (This places a value judgment on the answer to the question – you should have had your child vaccinated.)

Good: Has your child been immunized against measles?



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