



Project title: Understanding patient experiences of out-of-hours GP services: An interview study

TOPIC GUIDE: COGNITIVE INTERVIEWS WITH PATIENTS

Preparation before the interview

1. Discuss carefully the place and time of the interview with the study participant. Weigh the options of interviewing at the participant's home against choosing a neutral venue near their home. Some prefer more formal and public venues than others. Where the preference is for home interview, safety principles for researchers should apply (in accordance with the University Lone Working policy). Where the interview is taking place in the public settings, background noise and other distractions need to be minimised.
2. Check the researcher's copy of all ethics documentation: double copies of consent forms. It is advisable to have the spare copies of participant information sheets with you in case the participants lost theirs.
3. Check the equipment is in working order, spare batteries if needed.

The Cognitive Interview

Introduction

(To be said to all participants): I am a <NAME> a researcher from the Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry, conducting research about patient experiences of out-of-hours GP services.

In this study we are looking at the ways patient experience can be improved and we are interviewing patients who have recently used the out-of-hours GP service. In the interview I will ask you to complete a short questionnaire and to talk about its questions at some length and then you may be willing to share some of your recent experiences of contacting out-of-hours services.

Before we begin I need to make sure that you received all information that we provide for the participants in this interview. Are there any questions about the study that you would like to ask?'

Explaining what will happen in the interview and afterwards

'This is your opportunity to have your say about out-of-hours GP care and to share your experiences with us. The interview should not take longer than 40 minutes.

I will be recording the interview on a digital recorder, to ensure that we have an accurate and detailed record of your views. The digital recordings will be saved on a password-locked computer

and only those immediately involved in the research will listen to them. The recording will be transcribed word for word and any names or anything that could identify you will be removed so the information is anonymous. Once we have checked this process for accuracy, we will destroy the digital recording, retaining only the anonymised written summary. Then I will draw out the main ideas and themes and these will be put together with other people's ideas. These will be fed back to the out-of-hours GP service with the aim of introducing improvements to the service. The service will not be able to identify you from the information we feed back.

You are free to stop the discussion and/or the recording at any point. If there are questions that you would prefer not to answer, please let me know and we can move on to the next question.

Are you happy to carry on now and for me to record the discussion? Please, could you sign two copies of the consent forms: you keep one copy and I will take the other for our records'. (The consent forms must be already signed by the researcher).

Turn on the digital recorder.

During the interview

It is important to take notes (written notes preferably, otherwise mental mapping of topics disclosed by the participant) as the interview proceeds along the questionnaire items. Some of the ideas and examples may need to be picked up in the end of the interview – to ask the participant to expand on those.

Record non-verbal behaviour associated with each item (i.e. pausing, laughing out loud etc).

Part 1. Beginning the cognitive interview

'Now I would like to go through the out-of-hours questionnaire with you. We will be doing it in a slightly unusual manner, because we want to know more about what you were thinking when you read each question and how you decided to answer'.

Warm up session: 'THINK ALOUD' (Willis 2005, p.44).

Talk through the warm up example:

'When we look at questionnaire responses we don't really know what was going through the person's mind when they answer the questions and sometimes we may misunderstand the answers they give. We are interested in finding out if the out-of-hours questions in the survey make sense to people and how they understand and answer them.

To help you do this I want to help you to 'think aloud' when you are answering a question. So – try to visualise the place where you live, and think about how many windows there are in that place. As you count up the windows, tell me what you are seeing in your mind and what you are thinking about.

Now I'm going to take you through each question of the out-of-hours GP questionnaire to try and understand what you are thinking when you answer the questions'.

Part 2. Interviewing on questionnaire items

The questionnaire items (Out-of-Hours section of GPPS survey, n=7) will be tested using the following interview format:

- 1) Read aloud the question in its original form.
- 2) Ask the interviewee to comment in 'think aloud' manner.
- 3) Read the response options – ask to comment.
- 4) Use probes that would be appropriate in testing the question and/or response options.
- 5) Note down (map) the experience of out-of-hours GP care which the interviewee discloses along the way.
- 6) Ask for alternative suggestions on the question and/or response options.

Read the items to the participant and use the probes specified below (these can differ from question to question). If the interviewee brings up new ideas (examples of their experience) use the mapping technique or take written notes to ask later:

Question 1. (Q30) *If you wanted to, would you know how to contact an out-of-hours GP service when the surgery of health centre is closed?*

- Yes**
- No**

Possible probes:

- Was this hard or easy to answer?
- Can you repeat the question in your own words?
- What, to you, is the out-of-hours GP service?

Question 2. (Q31) *In the past 6 months, have you tried to call an out-of-hours GP service when the surgery or health centre was closed?*

- Yes, for myself..... Please go to Q32**
- Yes, for someone else...Please go to Q32**
- (No..... Please go to Section L - the option is non-applicable)**

Possible probes:

- How hard was this to answer? (Consider filters too)
- How do you remember this?

Question 3. (Q32) How easy was it to contact the out-of-hours GP service by telephone?

Very easy

- Fairly easy**
- Not very easy**
- Not at all easy**
- Don't know/didn't make contact**

Possible probes:

- How sure are you of your answer?
- Was this hard to answer?
- How did you arrive at the answer about the 'ease' of contact with OOH GP service?

Question 4. (Q33) Were you prescribed or recommended any medicines by the out-of-hours GP service you contacted?

- Yes..... Please go to Q34**
- No..... Please go to Q35**
- Don't know/doesn't apply Please go to Q35**

Possible probes:

- Can you repeat the question in your own words?
- How well do you remember whether this was a prescription or recommendation given to you?
- How sure are you of the answer?

Question 5. (Q34) How easy was it to get these medicines?

- Very easy**
- Fairly easy**
- Not very easy**
- Not at all easy**

Possible probes:

- Is it difficult to answer this?
- How did you arrive at the answer about the 'ease' of getting the medicines?

Question 6. (Q35) How do you feel about how quickly you received care from the out-of-hours GP service?

- It was about right**
- It took too long**
- Don't know/doesn't apply**

Possible probes:

- Can you repeat the question in your own words?
- How sure are you of the answer?
- How did you arrive at the answer about the 'quick' response from out-of-hours GP service?

Question 7. (Q36) Overall, how do you feel about the care you received from the out-of-hours service?

- Very good**
- Good**

- Neither good nor poor**
- Poor**
- Very poor**
- Don't know/doesn't apply**

Possible probes:

- Was it hard or easy to answer?
- How sure are you of the answer?

Part 3. Eliciting recent experience

This part of the interview is explorative, directed at the eliciting the interviewee's recent experience(s) of out-of-hours care. It is likely to be based on the examples that the interviewee already talked about in the cognitive interview so the open interview will be mapping techniques), however, for some interviewees this open question will be the opportunity that may have been waited for during the cognitive interview but being restrained by the format did not dare to share their experience in detail. Leave the question as open as you possible can:

'Thank you for your comments on the questionnaire. Now can I ask you about your recent experience of out-of-hours GP service? Would you like to talk a little bit more about this occasion: what happened to you, how did you contact the service, have you been able to receive the care you needed, and what did you feel about it?'

Part 4. Finishing the discussion

'And finally – we would like to have your ideas about how the service could have been better from your point of view.'

Question: ***Is there any way in which your contact with the out-of-hours service could have been better?***

Prompts:

- Obtaining information about the service
- Speed of response
- Helpfulness of the call operators
- Knowing who you were speaking to
- Explaining symptoms and other information
- Discussion with doctor
- The outcome of the consultation
- Issues relating to medicines

Thank you.