

1 Outpatients Department survey 2009: Sampling Problems

1.1 Introduction

For the 2009 Outpatients Department survey, trusts were asked to submit their sample to the Co-ordination Centre for final quality control checks before any questionnaires were mailed out. This sample checking procedure was first introduced for the 2006 inpatient survey and was found to be useful for identifying sampling errors and avoiding the common mistakes that can result in delays to the survey process. This document describes the errors made in sampling, divided into major (those requiring re-sampling) or minor (those that could be corrected before final data submission), and the recommendations made by the Co-ordination Centre to correct the sampling.

This document should be used by trusts and contractors to become familiar with past errors and to thus prevent these from recurring. If further assistance is required, please contact the Co-ordination Centre on 01865 208127.

1.2 Major errors

Errors are classified as major if they require the trust to resample, or to remove or replace patients from the sample. If major errors are not corrected, the trust's survey data cannot be used to construct performance indicators and the trust will be reported as not having submitting data for the national survey. There were 33 major errors noted in the Co-ordination Centre's sample checking and 27 trusts were advised to redraw their sample (sometimes more than once). The nature of these errors are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Summary of major errors

Major errors	Frequency
Inclusion of maternity/termination of pregnancy patients	14
Incorrect exclusions by age	5
Incorrect exclusions by date of attendance	3
Inclusion of psychiatry patients	2
Sampled incorrect period	1
Inclusion of GUM/STD clinic patients	1
Other	7
Total	33

Inclusion of maternity/termination of pregnancy patients

The guidance manual states that patients attending maternity outpatient clinics should be excluded from the sample. In addition, any patients attending an appointment concerning termination of pregnancy are also excluded from the survey due to issues of privacy and sensitivity. Fourteen samples submitted to the Co-ordination Centre contained patients whose main specialties were 501 (obstetrics) or 560 (midwifery) who should have been excluded under these criteria. These trusts either redrew their samples to exclude such patients or removed and replaced these patients from their existing samples.

Incorrect exclusions by age

Three trusts deliberately excluded all patients who were born in 1992 and/or 1993 to ensure that all patients in their sample were 16 years or over at the time the sample was drawn. As this would result in the exclusion of eligible patients, we requested that they redraw the sample using full date of birth (day, month and year) to ensure all eligible patients have a chance of being selected for the sample. One trust included patients aged under 16 years at the time of appointment and so were requested to replace these patients with those who met the age criteria for the survey. Another trust's sample had been drawn incorrectly and had excluded all patients over 52 years old. This trust was asked to redraw their sample.

Incorrect exclusions by date of attendance

The guidance manual states that the sample of patients should be selected randomly from a list of all Outpatients Department attendances from one month (choosing March or April or May 2009). Three trusts did not include attendances from the *whole* of their chosen sample month in their initial list of Outpatients Department attendances and so were asked to redraw their sample to include all patients.

Inclusion of psychiatry patients

The guidance manual states that patients attending an appointment at a psychiatric outpatient clinic should not be included in the sample. Two trusts included patients whose main specialities were 710 (adult mental illness) or 711 (child psychiatry) indicating that they were ineligible for inclusion. These patients were removed and replaced.

Sampled incorrect period

One trust's sample included patients attending appointments on dates outside the sampling period specified by the survey guidance (March, April or May 2009), submitting patients attending in June 2009. As this trust had sufficient attendances within the specified sampling period, the Co-ordination Centre requested the sample be redrawn to only include patients from one of the three permitted sampling months.

Inclusion of genito-urinary medicine (GUM) or sexually transmitted disease (STD) clinic patients

The guidance manual states that patients attending at GUM or STD clinics should not be included in the sample. One trust included patients whose main specialties were 360 (GUM/STD clinic) indicating that they were ineligible for inclusion. These patients were removed and replaced.

Other errors

The guidance manual specifies the requisite procedure to obtain a random sample of patients from a list of outpatient attendances from one month. Seven trusts did not follow the random sampling procedure correctly, resulting in errors that biased their samples. These anomalies were detected by the Co-ordination Centre during checking and these trusts were asked to redraw their samples following the procedure outlined in the guidance.

1.3 Minor errors

Errors are considered to be minor if re-sampling or replacement of patients is not necessary. Trusts which have made minor errors are advised that corrections need to be made to the sample information before the final data set is submitted to the Co-ordination Centre at the close of the survey. There were 51 minor errors identified in the sample checking, with 38 trusts identified as having made minor errors. The nature of these errors are summarised in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Summary of minor errors

Minor problems	Frequency
Incorrect PCT coding	20
Incorrect ethnic coding	18
Incorrect gender coding	5
Date of birth included	3
Missing attendance type data	2
Missing year of birth data	2
Main specialty miscoding	1
Total	51

Incorrect PCT coding

Incorrect coding of PCT of residence was the single most common cause of minor errors, and was detected in 20 trusts' samples. The main issues were the inclusion of out-of-date codes and incorrect or unknown codes.

Incorrect ethnic coding

In total, 18 trusts did not code patients' ethnicity as specified in the guidance manual.

- The most common error was the inclusion of codes that were not part of the 17 item alphabetical coding specified by the guidance manual
- A less common error concerned patients for whom ethnicity information was not known. The Co-ordination centre uses different codes for patients whose ethnicity is 'unknown' (this information has not been collected) and patients whose ethnicity is 'not stated' (when asked, patients who declined to state their ethnicity). However in three trusts' samples this distinction was not made, and 'unknown' and 'not stated' were combined in the same category
- One trust omitted to include ethnicity information for the majority of the patients in its sample.

Incorrect gender coding

Five trusts miscoded gender information, failing to use the 2 digit numerical coding specified in the guidance manual.

Full date of birth submitted

Year of birth is requested as part of the sample information, however three trusts submitted patients' date of birth rather than year of birth as specified in the guidance.

Missing attendance type data

As part of the sample information, acute trusts are asked to include a field coding whether the patient was attending an appointment at the trust for the first time or for a follow up appointment, a new requirement for the 2009 survey. One trust did not include attendance type data in its initial sample file, while another missed this information for only some of their patients.

Missing year of birth data

One trust failed to include correct year of birth data with its sample, another omitted this information for some of the patients included in their sample.

Main specialty miscoding

Incorrect main speciality coding was detected in one trust's sample.