

PREPARATION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE OUTPATIENTS DEPARTMENT SURVEY 2011

THE CO-ORDINATION CENTRE FOR THE
NHS PATIENT SURVEY PROGRAMME

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1 Introduction

The last Outpatients Department survey was last carried out in 2009 in all acute trusts in England that ran outpatient clinics. The average response rate was 53%. The survey results were used locally in quality improvement programmes and information drawn from the core questions were used by the Care Quality Commission in its assessment of acute and specialist trusts in England, covering the period 2009/10.

An Outpatients Department survey will again be undertaken as part of the national patient survey programme in 2011. The survey will give acute trusts information on outpatient care to facilitate targeted quality improvement. The data will also contribute to assessment of Department of Health Public Service Agreements (PSA) and be used by the Care Quality Commission. A similar methodological approach will be taken as in the previous three surveys.

As in the previous surveys, all trusts will be required to include a set of 'core' questions in their questionnaire and will also have the option of supplementing this with additional items from a validated bank of questions.

Amendments to the core questionnaire were made on the basis of the following considerations:

- Analysis of the 2009 survey data to examine item non response rates and floor / ceiling effects
- Consultation with stakeholders at the Department of Health and Care Quality Commission regarding the scope of the survey and to take account of policy priorities

The questionnaires were also cognitively tested with 15 patients who had recently attended the Outpatients Department to ensure that the question wording and response options are suitable and comprehensible to respondents.

This document describes the alterations that have been made to the 2009 core questionnaire, in order to prepare for the 2011 survey, such as which questions have now been placed as optional questions in the bank.

2 New items added to the core questionnaire

Following feedback from policy colleagues at the Department of Health, seven new questions have been added to the core questionnaire. All question numbers relate to their position in the core questionnaire.

The following question has been added to provide a more detailed understanding of patients' experiences of access/waiting and what impact this may have on their condition:

3. Did your symptoms or condition get worse while you were waiting for your appointment?

- 1 Yes, definitely
- 2 Yes, to some extent
- 3 No
- 4 Don't know / Can't remember

The following question has been added to the questionnaire for two main reasons:

- i) It became apparent during testing that patients who attend outpatients frequently were struggling to answer the questions based on their most recent appointment. It was felt that by asking respondents first how many appointments they had had in the last 12 months, and then asking them to think about their most recent appointment would help them to focus on the most recent event.
- ii) Testing showed that without the knowledge that some respondents are attending outpatients on an ongoing basis, some responses could appear falsely negative, for example, responses to questions concerning the receipt of information about their condition. This new question will be useful for interpreting the results in later analysis.

4. In the last 12 months, how many times (including this one) have you visited the Outpatient Department for any condition?

- 1 This was the only time
- 2 2 to 3 times
- 3 4 to 8 times
- 5 More than 8 times

The following three questions have been added to the questionnaire with the aim of gaining deeper understanding into the care and treatment of those patients who have a long term condition or illness:

37. Was your appointment about a long term condition or illness that you need ongoing care or treatment for?

1 Yes → Go to 38

2 No → Go to 40

38. Did doctors and/or staff ask you what was important to you in managing your condition or illness?

1 Yes, definitely

2 Yes, to some extent

3 No, but I would have liked this

4 This was not necessary

39. Did your appointment help you to feel that you could better manage your condition or illness?

1 Yes, definitely

2 Yes, to some extent

3 No

4 This was not necessary

The following two questions on medication were added following discussions with stakeholders who felt this was an important area to expand on to gain a deeper understanding of those already on medication and how well any changes to this medication are communicated:

44. If you were taking any medication **before** your outpatient appointment, were any changes made to this medication?

1 Yes → Go to 45

2 No → Go to 46

3 I was not taking any medication before my appointment → Go to 46

45. Did a member of staff explain the **reason** for the change to your medication in a way that you could understand?

1 Yes, definitely

2 Yes, to some extent

3 No

4 I did not need an explanation

3 Items removed from the core questionnaire and added to the question bank

The following questions have been removed from the core questionnaire but have been kept in the question bank for optional inclusion at trusts' own discretion and so that year-on-year comparisons can still be made if these questions are regarded to be important. Question numbers refer to items' positions in the 2011 question bank questionnaire.

C3. Were you told why you would have to wait?

- The 2009 survey showed that 44% of respondents either skipped this question or ticked 'No, but I did not mind' or 'Don't know / Can't remember'. It was therefore felt that the data from the new questions added to the core questionnaire would be more useful for trusts.

F4. How long were you with the doctor?

- This question did not test particularly well during testing and was confusing for respondents such as those who saw a doctor initially, then went for an x-ray or test and then saw the doctor again at a later time. It also became apparent that it was difficult for participants to remember this length of time.
- It is not a particularly useful question and data from this question cannot be used for quality improvement

H10. Were you given enough privacy when being examined or treated?

- On balance it is felt that data from this question is less useful than other questions in the survey, particularly as there is a very similar question in the core that asks patients if they were given enough privacy when discussing their condition or treatment.

K2. How well organised was the Outpatients Department you visited?

- Although testing showed respondents were able to answer this question easily, probing by the researchers showed that people interpret it different ways so the data from this question is not particularly useful for quality improvement.
- The question is highly correlated with the 'overall' rating question - Bivariate Pearson correlation (trust-level) was high ($r=0.93$)

L8- L12. Your own health state today

- This measure of health and well-being (EQ-5D) has been removed from the core questionnaire as the results from this question were not used in the 2009 survey.
- Removing this question created much needed space in the core questionnaire for the addition of new questions that are more pertinent to understanding patients' experiences of care where results can be used by hospitals for quality improvement.

4 Changes to existing items

Minor amendments have been made to several questions both to improve patient comprehension and for consistency across surveys. These amendments are detailed below. Changes are shown with deletions struck-through and insertions underlined. Question numbers refer to items' positions in the 2011 core questionnaire.

1. Have you ever visited this Outpatients Department before for the same condition?

1 Yes **→ Go to 4**

2 No **→ Go to 2**

This question was previously Question 5 in the 2009 survey but it was moved to the start of the questionnaire in order to route those patients who have had a previous outpatients appointment past the subsequent questions on waiting times which were found to be irrelevant or confusing to this group of respondents.

6. Was your appointment changed **to a later date** by the hospital?

This question was previously Question 4 (2009 survey) but it was felt that it was better placed to follow the question on appointment times rather than following the question 'Before your appointment, did you know what would happen to you during the appointment?'

The sub-heading 'Waiting' has been expanded to '**Waiting in the hospital**' to clarify to respondents that this section refers to the time spent in the waiting room rather than the time waiting for an appointment. A prompt has also been added below this heading to remind respondents to answer the subsequent questions about their most recent appointment.

'Tests and Treatment' section: the location of this section has moved forward in the questionnaire, to better reflect the patient pathway.

13. Did a member of staff explain **why you needed these test(s)** in a way you could understand?

1 Yes, completely

2 Yes, to some extent

3 No

4 I did not need an explanation

14. Did a member of staff tell you **how** you would find out the results of your test(s)?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 3 Not sure/ Can't remember
- 4 I did not need an explanation

A new response option (I did not need an explanation) has been added to these two questions to take into account those patients who routinely undergo tests in outpatients and therefore do not need an explanation each time.

16. During your outpatient appointment, did you have any treatment for your condition?'

During cognitive testing, it emerged that there was some uncertainty about how to define the term 'treatment'. The following text was therefore added before this question: 'By treatment we mean any medical or surgical intervention, procedure or therapy'.

Subsequent testing showed that this explanatory note helped respondents to answer the question.

19. Was ~~all or~~ any part of your outpatient appointment with a **doctor**?

The wording has been changed slightly for further clarity after it emerged during testing that participants were misreading the question to ask whether **all** of their appointment was with a doctor (rather than 'all or any').

21. Did the doctor seem aware of your medical history?

This question was previously Question 19 (2009 survey) and located at the end of the 'Seeing a Doctor' section. It has been moved further forward in this section as it was felt it more closely demonstrated logical progression during an appointment.

27. Who was the **MAIN** ~~main~~ other person, other than a doctor, you saw? (Tick **ONE** only)

- 1 A nurse
- 2 A physiotherapist
- 3 A radiographer
- 4 Someone else (**Please write in box**)

The wording has been altered slightly for further clarity. Testing showed that not all respondents were aware this was referring to the professional 'other than a doctor'.

30. Do you see the same doctor or other member of staff whenever you go to the Outpatients Department?

- 1 This was my first visit → **Go to 35**
- 2 Yes, always → **Go to 36**
- 3 Yes, sometimes → **Go to 35**
- 4 No, never → **Go to 35**
- 5 Can't remember → **Go to 35**

This question was previously Question 6 (2009 survey), in Section A and only answered by those patients who had previously had an outpatients appointment. However, due to the restructuring of section A, it has been moved to the start of the 'Overall about the appointment' section to be answered by all respondents. An additional response option 'This was my first visit' has been added to accommodate those patients who had not previously visited the outpatients department. Moving the question to this section has the advantage of being able to add routing instructions so that those patients who always see the same member of staff are instructed to skip the next question on whether or not staff introduced themselves which is not relevant to this group of patients.

36. Were you involved **as much as you wanted to be** in decisions about your care and treatment?

- 1 Yes, definitely
- 2 Yes, to some extent
- 3 No

The words 'as much as you wanted to be' have been emboldened to further emphasise these words because it emerged during testing that some participants were just focussing on how involved they were, regardless of whether it was as much as they wanted to be.

5 Changes to covering letters

A minor change has been made to the covering letters that are sent to patients, in order to provide them with the clearest information possible about the running of the survey. The change has been made to a heading on the first page and of the first and third mailing letters:

How will my response ~~taking part in this study~~ be kept confidential?

Copies of the letters are attached with tracked changes.

6 Appendix: Summary of the cognitive testing

6.1 Introduction

The draft questionnaire was tested with 15 people, all of whom had had an outpatient appointment within the previous six months. Interviews were carried out between 15th and 25th February 2011. Participants were recruited through an advert in a local paper and a mix of people with regard to their age, sex, and ethnic origin were sought. The age and sex of the respondents was as follows:

- 8 women (aged 25-66)
- 7 men (aged 29-65)

The ethnic background of the respondents was:

- 12 white British
- 2 Pakistani
- 1 Black African

Interviews were carried out with a mix of both first time and repeat Outpatient appointment attendees. Three participants, who had more complex long term conditions, had visited more than one type of Outpatient Department in the last six months.

This document outlines the key findings from testing the draft questionnaire for the 2011 Outpatient Department survey.

6.2 New questions

Eight new questions were suggested for inclusion in the questionnaire for cognitive testing. Our findings from testing these questions and our recommendations on the inclusion of these new questions in the 2011 survey are outlined below.

Q3 *'Did you feel that the length of time you waited before your appointment was...?'*

Some respondents who'd had their outpatient appointment in a short space of time following referral from their GP (i.e. 3-4 weeks) ticked 'About right' but commented that they got their appointment sooner than they'd expected and so would have liked to have ticked a response that was worded in a way that better reflected their satisfaction with the service (such as 'very swift'). As they were able to answer the question, changes to the wording of the response options seems unnecessary.

Recommendation: only consider adding to the 2011 core questionnaire if there is sufficient space as it is less useful than some of the other new questions

Q4 *Did your symptoms or condition get worse while you were waiting for your appointment?*

This question appeared to be understood by most respondents and generally tested well. However, one interviewee ticked 'Yes definitely' although her condition did not get worse whilst she was waiting for her appointment. She commented that she had ticked this option because she was in so much pain and felt that she had had to wait too long for an appointment.

Recommendation: as this question was understood as intended by all but one interviewee, add to the 2011 core questionnaire

Q5 *'Are you aware that the NHS Constitution states that you have a right to start treatment within maximum waiting times?'*

This question caused confusion for some respondents as they appeared to be focussing on whether or not they had heard of the NHS Constitution rather than 'waiting time' policy. Therefore, before the second round of testing, the words 'the NHS Constitution states that' were removed to simplify the question and to ensure it was being interpreted in the same way by respondents. One interviewee in a subsequent interview misinterpreted the meaning of this question and answered it based on the waiting time information displayed in the Outpatient Department waiting room (indicating specific waiting times for that day/department).

Recommendation: do not include in the 2011 survey. Although the revised question wording ('*Are you aware that you have a right to start treatment within maximum waiting times?*') appeared to be better understood by respondents, we question the usefulness of the data obtained from this question. Firstly, it is not clear whether patients will consider the time between their referral and first appointment or the time between referral and actually getting treatment on the ward. Secondly, this is a public opinion question, but patients who are answering this question have recently been referred for their first outpatient appointment, so they are more likely to be aware that there are maximum waiting times and therefore the results are likely to be somewhat misleading.

Q6 *'How many Outpatient Department appointments have you had in the last 12 months?'*

Although this question was not suggested by stakeholders, it was added to the questionnaire following the first round of interviews for two reasons:

- 1) Patients who attend outpatients frequently struggled to answer the questions based on their most recent appointment. It was felt that by asking respondents first how many appointments they had had in the last 12 months, and then asking them to think about their most recent appointment would help them to focus on the most recent event.
- 2) Testing showed that without the knowledge that some respondents are attending outpatients on an ongoing basis, some responses could appear falsely negative, for example, responses to questions concerning the receipt of information about their condition. This new question will be useful for interpreting the results.

The wording of the question and response options was refined during testing to 'In the last 12 months, how many times (including this one) have you visited the Outpatient Department for any condition?' to ensure that respondents count their most recent appointment.

Recommendation: add this new question to the 2011 survey

Q42. *'Was your appointment about a long term condition or illness that you need ongoing care or treatment for?'*

This question did not appear to pose any problems during testing although it should be noted that people may interpret the phrase 'long term condition' slightly differently.

Recommendation: add to the 2011 core questionnaire

Q43. *'Did doctors and/or staff ask you what was important to you in managing your condition or illness?'*

Of the nine respondents who were eligible to answer this filtered question, it did not appear to pose any specific problems during testing although some respondents appeared to be answering it more in terms of whether or not the doctors had given them information/advice to help them manage their condition rather than whether or not the doctor had asked them what was important to them. One interviewee who ticked 'no' explained that he does his own research on the internet for information on his condition and that the doctor doesn't really ask him about what he wants to do to manage his condition. Another respondent, who also ticked 'no' said she would have liked it if the doctor had asked her more about how she manages everyday activities (e.g. washing and dressing) and what she could or could not do – and perhaps referring her to see an occupational therapist. One interviewee ticked 'Yes, definitely' and explained that she was concerned about the weight she had gained due to her condition and the doctor had referred her to see a dietician.

Q44 *'Did your appointment help you to feel that you could better manage your condition or illness?'*

The respondents generally appeared to answer this question without difficulty, although when probed by the researchers some respondents appeared to be answering the question based on what they had been thinking about when answering the previous question so there may be quite a bit of overlap in the responses to these questions. For instance, the respondent who ticked 'Yes, definitely' at Q43 ticked 'Yes, definitely' at this question and clarified that her referral to see a dietician made her feel like something was being done to help her. Similarly one of the interviewees who had ticked 'No' at Q43 also ticked 'No' at this question citing the same reason. However, one interviewee ticked 'Yes, to some extent' and had ticked 'No' at Q43 and explained that he did find the appointment helpful, but ticked 'to some extent' rather than 'definitely' because the doctor did not really get involved in providing info/advice about how he could manage his condition. Another participant answered 'yes, to some extent' because he felt that to answer 'Yes, definitely' would be wrong because his condition was ongoing. He therefore seemed to interpret this question in terms of whether or not the appointment had actually improved his condition -rather than whether it had helped him better 'manage' it.

Recommendation: as detailed above there appears to be some overlap with Q43 so only add to the questionnaire if there is sufficient space.

Q45 *'Before you left the Outpatients Department, were any new medications prescribed or ordered for you?'*

The new response options which were added to find out where the medication had been dispensed caused some confusion: one interviewee stated that he did not think that medication could be, or was ever, dispensed by a GP. He said that he felt that the phrase 'community pharmacy' seemed outdated, and was unsure exactly what sort of pharmacy this term would cover. Another interviewee ticked the 'community pharmacy' response option but it became apparent through probing by the researcher that he was thinking about the doctor in the outpatients department. Another interviewee was unsure how many responses she should tick as she had received medication from both the hospital and GP surgery.

The response options were simplified based on additional feedback from the DH, and the following question was tested in subsequent interviews:

Q45. Before you left the Outpatients Department were any **new** medications prescribed or ordered for you?

- 1 Yes → **Go to 46**
- 2 No → **Go to 49**
- 3 New medications were recommended but my **GP prescribed it later** → **Go to 49**

There new third response option appeared to be understood by respondents in subsequent testing although it should be noted that the revised version was not been tested in depth (none actually ticked it). Furthermore it should be noted that adding in this additional response option at this filter question may affect the composition of the respondents answering the subsequent questions on medications of which two are PSA questions (patients who had their medications prescribed by their GP will now miss out these PSA questions).

Recommendation: keep the question in its original format (with just two response options –'Yes' and 'No')

Q49 *'If you were taking any medication **before** your outpatient appointment, were any changes made to this medication?'*

This question was understood by the interviewees and generally appeared to test well, although it should be noted that most respondents were not taking medication before their appointment so simply scanned the response options for 'No'. One participant felt that this question was a little

simplistic for his situation, explaining that he had painkillers before he was given new medication at the appointment and told not to take both at the same time.

Recommendation: add to the 2011 core questionnaire

Q50 *'Did a member of staff explain the reason for the change to your medication in a way that you could understand?'*

This question was only answered by 3 of the interviewees, but it did not appear to pose any problems and was understood.

Recommendation: add to the 2011 core questionnaire although it should be noted that it may only be applicable to a relatively small number of patients.

6.3 Suggested changes to existing questions

The testing highlighted some issues with the interpretation of some of the existing questions which are outlined below.

Q19 *'During your outpatient appointment, did you have any treatment for your condition?'*

A few participants were unsure how to define the term 'treatment'. One interviewee said she was unsure how to complete this question and asked the researcher what 'treatment' meant and whether this included advice or referral to an outside agency.

Another interviewee ticked 'yes' and explained that his prescription was changed and that he considered this to be 'treatment'. Therefore the following text was added underneath the sub-heading for testing: *'By treatment we mean any medical or surgical intervention, procedure or therapy'*. This addition appeared to help clarify what we mean by treatment for participants: one commenting that she did consider verbal advice from a doctor to be 'treatment' but that due to the explanation she had re-thought her response.

Recommendation: add this explanatory text underneath the treatment sub-heading.

Q16 *'Did a member of staff explain why you needed these test(s) in a way you could understand?'* and **Q17** *'Did a member of staff tell you how you would find out the results of your test(s)?'*

One interviewee said that she was not told why she needed the tests but this was because she had received them many times before and was fully aware of the process. Another interviewee said she did not really need an explanation as she has a blood test each time she attends outpatients, so it's not necessary for the staff to explain it to her. She ticked 'Yes completely' and said that they explained why she needed a blood test the first time.

Recommendation: Add a response option 'I did not need an explanation' at both questions.

Q22 *'Was all or part of your outpatient appointment with a **doctor**?'*

One participant stated that he found this question rather confusing as seeing the word 'all' first he thought that he should answer 'no' because he saw a doctor and a nurse. This misunderstanding would have led to him missing out the next seven questions if it had not been for the probing by the researcher. This issue had also arisen when the questionnaire had been previously tested in 2009. Therefore to avoid any confusion the question was revised before the final round of testing to *'Was any part of your outpatient appointment with a **doctor**?'* This revised wording did not cause any difficulty for the respondents in subsequent interviews.

Recommendation: use the suggested revised wording

Q31. *'Who was the **main** other person you saw?'*

There seemed to be some confusion amongst some participants about who this question was 'getting' at. Testing showed that not all respondents were aware this was referring to the professional 'other than a doctor': one interviewee commented that there were two other members of staff present – a medical student and what she thought might have been a junior doctor. She wrote both these names in the box. She did not appear to notice this question was asking about

the 'main' other person seen other than a doctor. Another participant queried whether the instruction in the previous question which said 'other than a doctor', still applied. The question was therefore re-worded during testing to '*Who was the **MAIN** person, **other than a doctor**, you saw?*' and this tested well.

Recommendation: use the suggested revised wording

Q34 '*Do you see the same doctor or other member of staff whenever you go to the Outpatients Department?*'

A new response option 'This was my first visit' was added to this question before testing. In general, this question seemed to test well although one interviewee initially struggled to answer this question as she did not see the new response option. Following the first round of interviews this option was therefore moved to be the first option instead of the last. Subsequent interviews showed no further issues with this question.

Recommendation: keep this new response option and keep it as the first option listed.

Q40 '*Sometimes in a hospital or clinic, a member of staff will say one thing and another will say something quite different. Did this happen to you?*'

Two participants ticked 'No' although it emerged they had both only seen one member of staff so should have ticked the new option 'I only saw one member of staff'. Therefore this new response option was moved to be the first, rather than the last response option.

Recommendation: as this is a PSA question it was later suggested by stakeholders to remove this option to allow comparisons over time.

Q41 '*Were you involved as much as you wanted to be in decisions about your care and treatment?*'

There was some confusion and 'misreading' of this question: two participants read 'decision' as 'discussions'. Another participant ticked 'no' because she felt she wasn't involved in decisions about her care and treatment, however when asked about this she said that she had not really want to be involved.

Recommendation: embolden the words 'as much as you wanted to be' in the question

Q52 '*Did a member of staff tell you about what danger signals regarding your illness or treatment to watch for after you went home?*'

One interviewee found this question difficult to answer and commented that it didn't really apply to her and she did not see the last response option 'I did not need this type of information' so was unsure what to tick. Once this option was pointed out to her by the researcher, she said she would have ticked it if she'd noticed it (i.e. the wording was appropriate). Another respondent found this question straightforward to answer, but probing by the researcher showed that he was thinking about the danger signals of his medication rather than his illness.

Q54. '*Was the main reason you went to the Outpatients Department dealt with to your satisfaction?*'

Before testing, the response option 'The reason I visited is still being dealt with' (option 4) was added to this question. Two participants were frustrated by this question: one wanted to reflect her view (by ticking 'to some extent') but felt that she could not because the issue was still being dealt with and thought she had to tick option 4. This new option was therefore removed for subsequent testing. One interviewee answered 'yes completely' to this question but her condition was still ongoing. She did not hesitate when answering the question and did not find this odd in anyway suggesting that taking out the non-specific response option was not a mistake.

Recommendation: remove the response option '*The reason I visited is still being dealt with*' so the question remains the same as it did in 2009.