Incentives and survey length:
Does offering a choice result in higher response rates?

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Overview

• To support the evaluation of the Comprehensive Primary Care Plus model, we fielded a medical practice-level web survey.
  – **Goal of survey:**
    • Measure care delivery progress in primary care practices
  – **Survey content:**
    • Care delivery questions presented in 2 sections
    • Wanted practices to at least complete the first section (13 critical items) to help select comparison practices
  – **Sample:** potential comparison practices
  – **Respondent:** Practice manager
  – **Incentive:** $100 post-paid incentive for full survey completion
How do we maximize response to critical items?

• Similar to surveys with screeners

• Can we obtain higher response rates to the screener if we offer other choices than simply full survey completion?
  – Experiment to test what choices result in highest response rates

• Anchoring (Tversky & Kahneman 1974): suggests that first piece of information is most important for decision-making process

• Research question: Does initially offering (1) a lower incentive for a smaller burden or (2) a higher incentive for a larger burden result in higher response rates?
Methods

• Web survey fielded to 8,245 primary care practice managers

• Randomly assigned to one of three incentive/burden offers
  – Offer 1: “You will receive $100 for completing this 30-minute survey.”
  – Offer 2: “If you only have 10 minutes available, you can complete the short version of this survey for $20, or you can receive $100 for completing the 30-minute version.”
  – Offer 3: “You will receive $100 for completing this 30-minute survey, but if you only have 10 minutes available, you can complete the short version for $20.”

• Offers were repeated in welcome packet, invitation, and mail, FedEx, email, and phone reminders
## Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offer</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Number of assigned practices</th>
<th>Percent responding (brief survey only or full survey)</th>
<th>Percent responding to full survey</th>
<th>Percent responding to brief survey (but not full survey)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Full survey offer only</td>
<td>2,772</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Brief survey, then full survey</td>
<td>2,715</td>
<td>36.9*</td>
<td>35.5*</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Full survey, then brief survey</td>
<td>2,758</td>
<td>37.8*</td>
<td>36.1*</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.05 (χ² test of difference comparing offer 2 with offer 1, or comparing offer 3 with offer 1)*
Discussion

• Few respondents chose to complete just the short survey
  – Misunderstood incentive offer for critical items only?
  – Perceived importance of completing full survey?

• Simplest offer ($100 for 30-min survey) outperformed both choice options
  – Why?

• Social exchange theory may explain
  – Motivate survey participation by encouraging trust and having benefits outweigh costs (Dillman 2014)
  – Choice conditions increased cost because decision is more complex
  – Complexity of choice diminished the perceived reward of the incentives vs. the cost
Key Takeaways

• Keep it simple
  – Evidence showed the single incentive with single burden outperformed both alternatives with different incentive offers and burden requirements
    • Choice may have overcomplicated response decision
    • Consistent with previous findings on simplicity in survey design (Antoun et al 2017; Fanning 2005; Dillman 2014)

• Future research
  – Explore connection between incentive amount and burden on response rates
    • Were these results a function of simplicity, larger incentive, or both?
For More Information

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