

Not another questionnaire! Maximizing response rate, predicting non-response and assessing non-response bias in postal questionnaire studies of GPs.

Barclay S (1), Todd C (1), Finlay I (2), Grande G (1), Wyatt P (2).

(1) General Practice Research Unit, University of Cambridge, UK.

(2) Department of Palliative Medicine, University of Wales College of Medicine, UK.

Aims.

- 1) To investigate the effectiveness of follow up procedures when undertaking a postal questionnaire study of GPs.
- 2) To investigate the use of publicly available data in assessing non-response-bias.
- 3) To investigate the development of regression models predicting responder behaviour.

Methods.

Postal questionnaire study of a random sample of 600 GPs in Wales concerning their training and knowledge in palliative care.

Results.

A cumulative response graph permitted optimal timing of follow-up mailings: a final response rate of 67.6% was achieved. Differences were found between responders and non-responders on several parameters, and between sample and population on some parameters. Logistic regression analysis indicated medical school of qualification and current membership of the RCGP to be the only significant predictors of response. Late responders had been qualified for longer.

Conclusions.

The optimal timing of reminders may be judged from plotting the cumulative response rate: at least three reminders are worth sending. There are few parameters that significantly predict GPs who are unlikely to respond: more of these may be included in the sample, or they may be targeted for special attention. Publicly available data may be readily used in the analysis of non-response bias and generalisability.