

PREPARING A FOCUS GROUP WITH NITERÓI PRIMARY HEALTH CARE PHARMACISTS

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Introduction

Focus Group is a qualitative interview methodology that involves the interaction of a small group of participants to discuss a specific topic, led by a moderator¹. The objective is to generate broad problematization and obtain in-depth knowledge concerning attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, opinions and reality of the interviewees². This type of methodology is useful for diagnosing and identifying problems, defining educational strategies and understanding the experience of participants³. Due to these characteristics, focus group is one of the methodologies applied in studies regarding continuing health education, a professional training strategy that proposes the reflection and analysis of work practices, aiming to identify the problems experienced by the professional in their routine, and seeking ways to improve the quality of the service provided⁴. The abstract aims to describe the process of preparing a focus group with Niterói Primary Health Care pharmacists, which is part of the doctoral research “Permanent Health Education for Pharmacists from Primary Health Care in the City of Niterói”.

Material and Methods

The starting point for preparing the focus group was to identify primary health care units and their pharmacists by using data available on National Health Facility Registry (CNES). In this database, we collected the location and contact information of the health units, as well as pharmacists' data like employment status and working hours. This information helped us to contact the pharmacists and invite them to focus group when visiting the units. Before visits starts, the research team held regular meetings to discuss articles that addressed this methodology to understand how it is carried out, what the responsibilities of the moderators and observers, and what materials would be necessary during its realization. After the studies, the group defined the role of each member, designed a script visit and a script for conducting the focus group, and provided a training to the unit visits for pharmacists' invitation, and to conduct the focus group.

Results and Discussion

We identified 27 pharmacists allocated on 12 health units distributed across three Niterói regions: Centro, Região Oceânica, and Região Norte. Initially, we contacted the units by phone to invite the pharmacists, but it was unsuccessfully, because for most units the data collected on CNES was outdated. So we contacted the Pharmaceutical Assistance Coordination of the city, who sent the invitation to the pharmacists, and thus we obtained the first responses, but not in sufficient numbers to carry out a focus group. Therefore, we visited the health units to reach these professionals more effectively. The units were visited by two members of the research team, who organized the visits according to the location of the health units. Thus, there were 3 groups of establishments according to the regions of the city, and we conducted 7 visits on alternated days. For some units, we did not reach pharmacists on the visit day, because it was not their workday, or they were on vacation, and because one of the units was under renovation. So, a maximum of three visits to each unit was stipulated to meet the minimum number of

participants required for a focus group (6 to 8 people). There was broad acceptance and interest of participating, 11 of the 12 pharmacists contacted agreed to participate in the research.

During the visits, discrepancies on the data collected in the CNES and reality were observed. In only four locations we contacted the same pharmacists registered in the CNES. In the other units, discrepancies were identified in the number of pharmacists present: in four of these locations, there were fewer pharmacists than those registered in the CNES, and in two of them, the pharmacists found did not correspond to those registered in the system. Furthermore, during the visits we were informed that some pharmacists had been reassigned from the unit, or were in the process of retiring, or had ended their temporary contracts, and there were pharmacists in other sectors of the unit such as management and dispensing of medicines of other components of Brazilian Pharmaceutical Services, which may justify these discrepancies.

Conclusion

This experience allowed us to observe that a focus group preparation requires researchers' knowledge about the methodology but is important that they prepare themselves to deal with adverse situations by creating strategies to face challenges with flexibility and creativity so that they can effectively conduct the proposed methodology.

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