

Everything In Moderation: 12 Tips For Moderating Healthcare Market Research

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Market research is designed as a way to peer into people's minds, but it is often only as effective as the person who is moderating the process. It is a job that requires a lot of experience and skill to do well. A moderator should be confident, a quick learner, and a people person. Good market research moderators also need to be experts at handling many different personalities and different needs – from the people in the room to the people behind the glass.

Essentially, the moderator is just as important as the research subjects because the moderator is the one who draws out people's opinions in a way that is productive and useful. For successful moderation in a Healthcare market research, try following these top 12 tips:

1. Let the participants know what to expect.

Everyone participating in the research are going to be more comfortable and cooperative if they know what to expect, so be sure to start off the session with a thoughtful and thorough introduction that prepares the participants for what's in store.

2. Be prepared.

Not to sound too dramatic, but being a moderator is a little like being a performer taking the stage. Once you're on, you need to know all your material so you can get through the "show" without a hitch. Know your discussion guide back to front and make sure you've learned in advance about the relevant therapy areas (which may include reaching out to physicians and support groups for information). At the same time, don't be trying to show off what you know. The participants are the experts, and that's why they're there – make sure they know that.

3. Create a comfortable environment.

As a moderator, your mood and attitude will set the tone for the room, so relax! Be friendly and calm, and make sure participants feel at home. Be sensitive to any particular needs they might have – do they need visual or hearing aid systems, would they like a caregiver to be present? – let them know they can take a break at any time. You want to build a rapport with participants so that they feel comfortable enough to share their genuine opinions with you.

4. Stay neutral.

Not only is it your job to moderate, but also to remain moderate. Healthcare issues can bring out a lot of passion in people, but a moderator needs to remain unbiased. If participants sense that you have your own perspective, it may affect their answers, so behave as though you are completely opinion-free. This also applies to the way you respond to their opinions. While you should give them positive reinforcement for offering their thoughts, don't react to the content of those thoughts. It's important that they don't feel that you're judging what they say, either positively or negatively. You're there to facilitate the discussion, not to participate.

5. Give participants plenty of time to think and respond.

While you don't want to let the proceedings lag or become awkward, silence is not a bad thing when used properly. Participants will not always have every answer on the tip of their tongues; when interviewing a patient, perhaps due to the state of their health, they will need a little extra time to find and form their thoughts, so give them that time.

6. Be a good, empathetic listener.

For example, if interviewing a patient, show sincere empathy for their concerns and pay close attention to what they tell you. People are more forthcoming when they can sense that you are really interested in what they have to say. Demonstrate that you're listening by referring back to some of their previous answers when relevant. This will make it clear to them that their opinions are being heard and are valued, which will likely encourage them to share even more.

7. Keep track of time.

This may seem minor and even obvious, but it's neither. If a healthcare professional is particularly passionate about a new drug entering the market or a patient is especially vocal about their latest consultation, you could be nearing the end of the session before you realize you still haven't even touched on some key questions! Keep tabs on the clock and make

certain youâ€™re making good time as you progress.

8. Donâ€™t let dominant personalities take over.

Understanding the different personality types that tend to reveal themselves in the focus group setting is critical for effective moderation. Some people love to talk while others are more reticent. Donâ€™t let the dominant people overshadow or discourage the quieter types. If someone is trying to take over the conversation, very politely thank them for their thoughts and then tell the group that you would like to hear what others have to say. Make a special effort to give positive attention and encouragement to those who seem reluctant to speak.

9. Give each individual interview your full focus and attention.

When doing in-depth interviews (IDIs), the moderator should approach each participant as if they were the sole interview subject. Donâ€™t let them feel like theyâ€™re just â€œone of manyâ€ and donâ€™t interview them that way. You never know what might discover from each participant, so ask all the same questions you would ask if this person was your only interview subject.

10. Conduct interviews where it is best for the participant.

If interviewing a participant that has mobility issues, make sure you choose a location that will have lifts, ramps, appropriate parking, or anything else that might be needed. If the patient is quite ill, you may even need to do the interview at their home (which can have the added advantage of offering insight into the home environment).

11. Inform participants that they can cancel or postpone the interview at any time.

Hopefully this wonâ€™t happen, but it can provide some peace of mind to research participants if they know they have an â€œoutâ€. In some cases, this may just be because of nervousness on their part, but if their health is poor, it may also be a practical concern for them. On the other hand, it is possible that a HCP will be unexpectedly called into clinic or surgery.

12. Keep it interesting.

To borrow that performer metaphor again, a good moderator should be able to maintain the attention of the participants. If you ask engaging questions and keep a lively dialogue going â€œ while moving things along at a steady but not hurried pace â€œ then you should be able to keep everyone interested during the discussion process. If they lose interest, get fidgety, and start watching the clock, then the quality of responses will likely go downhill fast.

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