

Department of Research Abstracts

EFFECT OF MONETARY AND CHARITY INCENTIVES ON SURVEY RESPONSE RATES

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Background: Physician response to mailed surveys has declined in recent years. Studies on the effectiveness of various methods to increase response have varying results. While use of a modest monetary incentive has proven effective in increasing response to mailed surveys of pediatricians, little is known about the effect of an offer of charity contribution.

Objective: To measure the effects of two methods of increasing response to surveys of pediatricians: use of an up-front monetary incentive and a promised contribution to a charity.

Design/Methods: A randomized, experimental design was incorporated into 3 AAP Periodic Surveys in 2007 (N=1605 each); 535 pediatricians in each survey were assigned to either the monetary incentive group, charity contribution group, or the control group. Incentives (either a 2-dollar bill in the survey packet, or an offer to donate \$3.00 to a choice of AAP programs for every completed survey) were included only in the first of seven waves. The 3 surveys covered a range of topics: (1) Health Literacy/Subspecialty Referrals, (2) Sexual Violence Prevention, (3) Medical Liability Experiences.

Results: For all surveys, the response from the \$2 incentive group was significantly higher than that of the charity contribution and the control group. The final response rates for the combined surveys were 60% for the \$2 bill, 52% for the charity contribution and 55% for the control group (60% vs 52%, $p<.001$; 60% vs 55%, $p<.01$). The difference in response is primarily the result of the first wave (35% \$2 vs 23% charity, $p<.001$; 35% \$2 vs 24% control, $p<.001$); for each group, rates dropped steeply after the first wave. There was no significant difference in response (overall or by wave) between the charity contribution group and the control group. The benefit of the \$2 bill was consistent across survey topics. For each survey, the \$2 group had a higher response rate than the other groups combined, and was significantly higher for 2 of the 3 surveys (survey #1: 59% \$2 vs 55% others, $p=.07$; #2: 59% vs 51%, $p<.01$; #3: 62% vs 55%, $p<.01$).

Conclusions: Irrespective of survey content, inclusion of a \$2 bill as a token of appreciation in the first round mailing of surveys to pediatricians had a positive effect, while offering a charity incentive had no effect. Use of a modest monetary incentive can significantly increase survey response rates.

