

## **Surveys and Interviews**

**Literature Review:** Every project requires a literature review. You may think that your survey questions or subjects are unique, but chances are that someone somewhere has published something similar that will help guide you in designing and validating your survey. Be sure to do a thorough literature review before getting too far ahead.

**Scientific Approach:** A scientific approach is required. Decide if your survey or interviews fall into the category of "quantitative" or "qualitative" research. This is very important.

*For a quantitative survey*, you must have one or more hypotheses and an estimate of the number of survey respondents needed to reach statistical significance. You must be rigorous in your selection of survey candidates ensuring that you have a representative (or random) sample and can measure response rate. You should test your survey on a few representative subjects for validation and clarity BEFORE sending it out to the population you have selected. You should decide in advance how you are going to categorize and count your results. Early help from a statistician is advised.

Using E-mail lists to disseminate your survey is not appropriate unless you know how many subscribers are on the list and what their demographics and relevant characteristics are. You must also have the permission of the List administrator or owner to use the List to promulgate your survey.

Surveys are very dependant on response rate. If you are thinking of surveying physicians, keep in mind that most are constantly being surveyed and have little patience for yet another one. Keeping the survey as short as possible, on paper, and providing an easy way to return it (eg. fax or stamped envelope) usually helps to improve response rate. Some residents have had success offering a draw prize as enticement to fill in the survey.

*For a qualitative survey or interview*, you must study and demonstrate that you understand qualitative methods of research. You need to develop a structured and consistent interview approach with the purpose of achieving results that can be categorized into "themes". In this case, numbers are not important, but your method of sampling must be justified according to the qualitative method of analysis that you plan to use. Statistical analysis is not usually done. For a more detailed description of "qualitative" research, see the Webpage 'Research Resources'.

**Ethics:** Surveys DO require ethics approval. Consent must be obtained and confidentiality maintained. Surveys and interviews are usually classified as "behavioural" for the purposes of your ethics application, not "clinical". Be sure to check "behavioural" when you fill in your on-line application form.