

Topic Area: Recruitment and Retention

Title: Best Practices From the Data Collector's Perspective: Defining Hard and Soft Refusals and Exploring Effective Conversion Strategies

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Introduction. Clearly defining and differentiating between a soft refusal and a hard refusal is necessary to inform subsequent steps of screening and consenting respondents, and to ensure standardized documentation of recruitment efforts. In addition to study protocols to guide these efforts, Data collectors (DCs) have developed unique strategies to counteract respondent objections, which may be used to enhance study protocols and increase respondent cooperation.

Methods. Data collectors were asked to provide their definition of soft and hard refusals, give examples of each, and describe strategies used to convert soft refusals. Research team members collected, summarized, and independently coded responses using standard qualitative procedures. Emerging themes were discussed at an investigator meeting and used to create an interactive training for DCs.

Results. 10 DCs provided data. DCs defined soft refusals as related to respondents': current circumstances (e.g. lack of time, too busy); lack of information or comprehension, or perceived lack of benefit; or, non-verbal cues indicating uncertainty (e.g. passive avoidance of DCs). Data collectors offered specific strategies to address respondent objections. Hard refusals were seen as strong assertions suggesting further communication was not an option (hostile or non-hostile) or non-verbal cues that suggested hostility or threat.

Conclusions. Obtaining DCs definitions of soft versus hard refusals enhanced existing NCS protocols through the creation of concrete definitions and effective strategies validated by field experience. These data also provided examples of effective strategies DCs could use to effectively overcome and convert soft refusals.