

Focus Group Protocol Perceptions of the Public about Military Healthcare

I. Moderator's Opening Remarks

Good morning/afternoon. Welcome to our group discussion on military healthcare. My name is _____ and I will be leading today's discussion.

The purpose of our discussion today is to explore your opinions about the healthcare provided to the military community. This study is sponsored by the TRICARE program, which is the name given to the military healthcare system by the Department of Defense. I work for ICF International, a research and consulting company hired by the U.S. Department of Defense to help TRICARE managers and researchers better understand how people view the services they provide. We are conducting focus groups across the country.

II. Objectives and Agenda

We're here today to talk with you about your views on the healthcare provided to current military personnel, retirees, and their families. During the discussion please share your ideas and opinions. I have here a list of topics that we will cover, which I will introduce from time to time, but I won't be saying much, because we want to hear from you. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers in our discussion; we are interested in your opinions.

III. Disclosure

Before we begin, let's take a minute to do some administrative housekeeping and to go over the ground rules for the discussion.

First, your participation in this group is voluntary and you don't have to answer any question if you don't want to. If you have not done so already, please read and sign the consent form at your seat.

Note that this session will be audio-taped. The transcript of the tape will help me to write my report. It helps to place comments in context, and to make sure we capture all of the information accurately.

Your participation in this discussion is anonymous and all information will remain anonymous. Nothing said in this group will be associated with any individual by name. That is, we will not link your name or **your background information** with any comments that you make. The results of all of the focus groups will be combined to produce a report that provides the TRICARE managers and researchers with more insight into how the public views the military healthcare system. We will store the audio recordings of the discussions in our offices as required by our contract and destroy them once the federal contract auditing period has passed. Since everything that you say here will be kept anonymous, we also ask that what is said during this discussion stays in this room and that you do not discuss it with others.

Are there any questions on the consent form or anything else so far?

IV. Ground Rules

We have a few ground rules for this session:

- Please speak one at a time; I know this difficult, but we need to be as clear as possible for the tape.
- There are no right or wrong answers.
- We want to hear the good and the bad.

- We respect and value differences of opinion.
- Please avoid side conversations so that we can all hear what is being said.
- Finally, we need to hear from everyone in the course of the discussion, but you don't have to talk about every question.

V. Introduction

To begin, let's go around the room and introduce ourselves. Please only say your first name.

VI. The Agenda

A. Overall Knowledge

1. Let's make this a "round robin" question, where each of you answers in turn and everyone speaks once before we begin the discussion.

When you think about the military healthcare system, what is the first thing that comes to mind?

When you think about the healthcare provided by the Veterans' Administration or the "VA," what is the first thing that comes to mind?

- How are they alike?
- How are they different?

2. Thinking about your overall knowledge of the military healthcare system, how would you rate your knowledge from being "no knowledge at all" up to "a great deal of knowledge?"

3. Where do you get most of your information about the military healthcare system?

- Probe on each medium,
(If discussion goes directly to particular stories, use the four probes in Q. 4: story topic, positive/negative tone, point of story, whether the story gave them new information or not):

Personal experience – tell us a little about that

Probe: Is this participant former military, former military dependent?

If so, when, approximately: by engagement, Iraq or

Afghanistan, Gulf War, Vietnam, Korea, WWII,

other,

between wars?

Word of mouth, from a friend or family member – who mostly?

Probe: Is this person former military, former military dependent?

Probe: Do you usually believe what this person says?

(Do they trust this person's judgment?)

Radio – any particular station or show?

Probe: Do you listen to this station/show regularly?

TV – any particular station or show?

Probe: Do you watch this station/show regularly?

Newspapers – which ones

Probe: Do you read this paper regularly?

Magazines –which ones

Probe: Do you read this magazine regularly?

Some other source of information:

4. How much have you **read, or seen or heard** about the military healthcare system in the last 12 months? Would you say:

- A great deal
- A fair amount
- Not very much, or
- Nothing at all?

(If discussion goes directly to particular stories, use the four probes in Q. 4: story topic, positive/negative tone, point of story, whether the story gave them new information or not).

5. What topics or stories do you remember reading about, seeing or hearing about?

- What was the topic of the story?
- Was the tone positive or negative-was it good news or bad news?
- What was the point of the story?
- Did the story tell you something that you didn't already know?

B. Healthcare Quality Descriptions

Now let's talk about the quality of the healthcare that the military system provides to the different groups of people it serves.

1. The military healthcare system (and you remember that this is the care provided by the Department of Defense not the Department of Veterans' Affairs, or the VA) provides care to service members, retirees, and their families. Let's explore how you think about the quality of the healthcare you believe the military system provides to them.

a. Active duty service members: How would you describe the quality of the care the military healthcare system provides to active duty service members? For example, would you use words like excellent, good, fair, poor, or something else?

Probe: Why is that?

b. For family members of current military personnel: How does the care for family members of current military personnel compare to the quality of care provided to active duty service members? For example, would you say it is better, about the same, or worse, or something else?

Probe: Why is that?

c. And for military retirees and their families: How does the care for military retirees and their families, compare to the quality of care provided to active duty service members? For example, would you say it is better, about the same, or worse, or something else?

Probe: Why is that?

d. And for service members in the National Guard and Reserves: How does the care for service members in the National Guard and Reserves compare to the quality of care provided to active duty service members? For example, would you say it is better, about the same, or worse, or something else?

Probe: Why is that?

e. Finally, families of National Guard members and Reservists: How does the care for the families of National Guard members and Reservists , compare to the quality of care provided to active duty service members? For example, would you say it is better, about the same, or worse, or something else?

Probe: Why is that?

2. Now, let's think about the different types of care the military healthcare system provides and your views on the quality of that care.

a. First, let's consider the quality of inpatient care at military hospitals (also called Military Treatment Facilities). For example, would you describe it using words like excellent, good, fair, poor, or something else?

Probe: Why is that?

Probe: Are you thinking about any particular military hospital?

If so, Which one? (Get as much specificity as possible)

b. Now, think about the quality of physical rehabilitation for wounded service members: For example, would you describe it using words like excellent, good, fair, poor, or something else?

Probe: Are you thinking of any specific person or type of rehabilitation? (Get as much specificity as possible)

c. Next, consider mental health counseling for those eligible for care in the Military Health System: For example, would you describe it using words like excellent, good, fair, poor, or something else?

Probe: Are you thinking of any specific person or mental health condition? (Get as much specificity as possible)

d. And drug and alcohol counseling for those eligible for care in the Military Health System: For example, would you describe it using words like excellent, good, fair, poor, or something else?

Probe: Are you thinking of any specific person or situation? (Get as much specificity as possible)

e. Next is family counseling for those eligible for care in the Military Health System: For example, would you describe it using words like excellent, good, fair, poor, or something else?

Probe: Are you thinking of any specific situation? (Get as much specificity as possible)

f. And in terms of eliminating red tape, wait times and other barriers to care for those eligible for care wounded service members: For example, would you describe it using words like excellent, good, fair, poor, or something else?

Probe: Are you thinking of any specific situation? (Get as much specificity as possible.)

g. Of all the health services we just discussed, which area do you think is the Military Health System's greatest strength (provides the best care)?

h. Of all the health services we just discussed, which do you think is the Military Health System's weakest area?

3. Now, thinking about the overall picture, what is the first thing that comes to your mind? For, example, would you describe the quality of healthcare that the Military Health System provides to the military community using words like excellent, good, fair, poor, or something else?

Probe: What are some of the reasons for giving this score?

C. Comparisons

Now let's consider some comparisons.

1. In general, how does healthcare for the military community compare with healthcare for people not in the military? Would you say that military health care is:

Much better, Somewhat better, About the same, Somewhat worse, or Much worse?

Probe: Why did you choose that?

2. How would you describe the quality of healthcare that you yourself have received during the past 12 months: would you use words like excellent, good, fair, poor, or something else?

Probe: Why is that?

3. And when you compare the quality of healthcare that you have received during the past year with the quality of care that the military healthcare system provides overall, would you say that military health care is:

Much better, Somewhat better, About the same, Somewhat worse, or Much worse?

Probe: Why did you choose that?

D. Conclusion

- If you had to summarize, in a sentence, how you feel about the care provided by the military healthcare system what would your sentence be?

That brings this session to a close. Thank you for your thoughtful discussion.

Thank you for taking the time to provide input to this important study. Remember that all information you provided in this focus group will be kept completely anonymous. At no time will your responses be linked back to you.

- If you have any questions or provide any other comments please feel free to contact me at _____.

VII. Participant Demographics

Focus Group Participant Background Information

Please complete this form. Knowing some key information about the people who participated in the focus group helps us to better understand the information collected.

1. Have you ever served on active duty in any military Service, in either the active or reserve component?
Yes
No
2. What is your age today? _____
3. What is the highest grade or level of school that you have completed?
8th grade or less
Some high school, but no degree or GED
High school graduate or GED
Some college, or 2-year degree
Bachelor's degree
Graduate degree
4. Are you of Hispanic or Latino origin or descent?
No, not Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino

Yes, Mexican, Mexican American or Chicano
Yes, Puerto Rican
Yes, Cuban
Yes, Other Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino
5. What is your race? Please choose one or more of the following:
White
Black or African-American
American Indian or Alaska Native
Asian (e.g. Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese)
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (e.g. Samoan, Guamanian, or Chamorro)
6. Gender
Male Female
7. Thinking about your own health, in general, would you say it is:
Excellent
Good
Fair
Poor

Thank you!