

Vendor Differences

Comparing Methodologies



While it is easy to assume that any qualified HCAHPS survey vendor can provide your organization with results for public reporting, it would be a mistake to assume that all vendors and collection methods produce the same results. In fact, even though the questions are the same and survey protocols are clearly defined, you may be surprised to find out that all HCAHPS survey collection methods are not created equal, despite what some vendors might lead you to believe.

Comparing Apples to Oranges

One of the largest mail survey vendors (Brand X) recently released an article comparing their mail and telephone HCAHPS survey results. Their analysis showed that the results from their phone surveys are no different than those collected using mail surveys. It is PRC's belief that such generalizations are not only misleading, but without merit. Without conducting identical side-by-side surveys using telephone and mail methodologies, these assertions are, at best, guesswork.

Before making any decisions about HCAHPS survey vendors, methodology options or expanded survey efforts, it is important to separate truth from fiction.



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From day one, PRC was at the forefront in HCAHPS planning efforts, working to explore and understand methodology differences and the meaning behind the inherent variations that were found to exist.

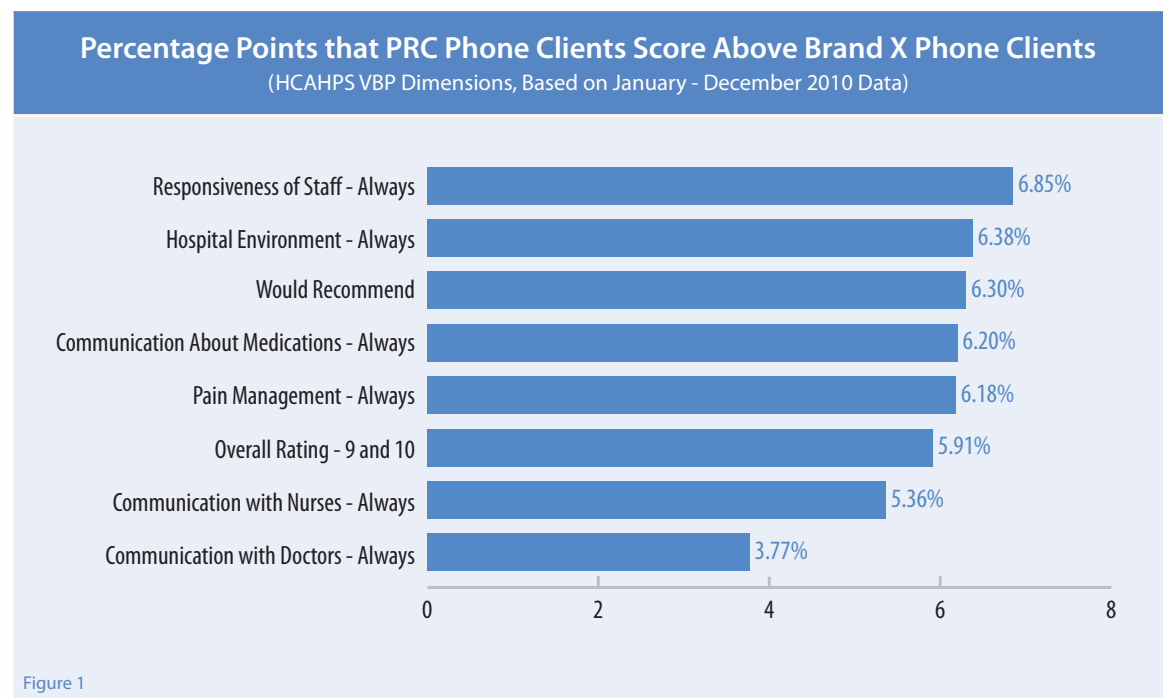
Beyond the Numbers: A Focus on Excellence and Loyalty

Just as there are differences between mail and phone vendors, it is also important to acknowledge that not all vendors who conduct phone surveys can claim the same completion rates, reliability and overall performance results.

If you needed heart surgery, would you consult with a general surgeon or a cardiovascular surgeon? To many, the answer is obvious. This same line of thinking and

decision making applies when it comes to choosing an HCAHPS research vendor. If you wanted to conduct your hospital's HCAHPS results using a phone methodology, would you choose a vendor that specializes in a mail methodology and does phone surveys only on request? We would hope your answer would be "no."

Figure 1 shows a comparison of aggregated HCAHPS scores for PRC's clients and Brand X's phone-only clients. In this comparison, PRC's clients outscore the other vendor's phone-only clients by an average of 6 raw percentage points per dimension. PRC's approach to phone research certainly has an impact on how clients perform on HCAHPS, but it is also important to recognize that PRC clients share a philosophy that focuses on excellence and loyalty, which also contributes markedly to these differences.



Percent 9/10's by Response Rate

(All Data)

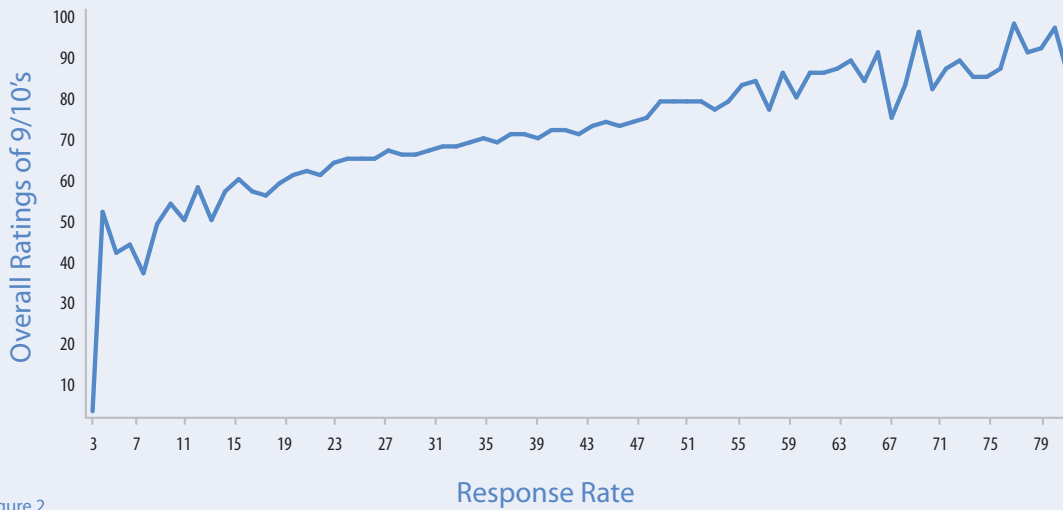


Figure 2

PRC has more than 30 years of experience using the telephone methodology; we have refined our approach to achieve high response rates. These high response rates not only lead to a more representative sample, they also capture the perceptions of the “silent satisfied” and produce higher results for your organization.

Why Response Rate Matters

How important is the response rate to your HCAHPS study? Figure 2, containing data from the CMS database, illustrates the correlation between response rate and the overall evaluation score. Generally speaking, this chart shows that a higher response rate results in a higher percentage of 9s and 10s. This data demonstrates what PRC has always believed: lower response rates are skewed by over representing the respondents with



negative perceptions and evaluations. To fully understand patients' perceptions it is important to hear from all patients, including those who were just generally satisfied, but may not be motivated enough to return a mail survey. Higher representation of all patients equals higher scores for your organization.

Mail Mode Preferable? CMS Says No

In addition to comparing methodologies, the article prepared by Brand X also claimed that mail surveys are the “gold standard” when it comes to measuring patient satisfaction. As the only evidence for this claim, the article mentions that CMS is mode adjusting HCAHPS phone surveys down to make them comparable to mail surveys for public reporting. It is important to know that mode adjustments have nothing to do with one methodology being superior to another; rather, mode

adjustments are necessary because of the inherent differences between methodologies.

The Data Adjustment Report for the CAHPS Hospital Survey produced by CMS provides further substantiation that there truly is no “gold standard” to be found in the mail survey: “Because it is the most commonly used mode in patient surveys, CMS selected the Mail Only mode as the reference mode of survey administration. The choice of mail mode as the reference mode does not indicate that mail mode is preferable to other approved modes in any way.” (Mode and Patient-mix Adjustment of the CAHPS Hospital Survey, p. 4, www.hcahpsonline.org)

Although the mail methodology may be the most commonly-used method for collecting HCAHPS survey results, it would be incorrect to assert that it is preferred over other collection methods.



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