

## Gaining Clinical Insight: Physician Panels

### Panel Design

Physician panels are fundamentally different from physician interviews. You will be bringing a group of individuals together in a single setting. (We address a single physical setting here; web-based panels have their own characteristics.) Choosing the participants, ideally between 3 and 6, is critically important. They should not be of one background nor of one view of clinical practice. You're seeking some commonality of competence while striving for some diversity of views. Most importantly, decide if you're going for doers or thinkers, front-line practitioners or academics, day-to-day docs or key opinion leaders (KOLs). Choose the former if you want to assess how a new product prototype should work and interact with its user, the latter if you want to learn the ideal characteristics of a future product concept.

### Geography and Costs

The overall cost of a physician panel can vary widely. If you can recruit from a single metropolitan area, you'll have the advantages of limiting travel, hotel, facility and meal costs if the panel can be successfully convened within a single day. Such a panel becomes, in effect, a focus group. However, depending upon your objective, it may be difficult to identify persons with the requisite knowledge and experience within one geographic area, especially if they all must fit the KOL definition. If you are recruiting KOLs throughout the US, your total cost per participant can easily reach \$5,000 or more for a gathering lasting a day and a half.

### The Panel Agenda and Discussion

Your meeting's agenda must be carefully designed, yet you must be prepared to abandon it at certain times. The flow of discussion topics must be rational so as to properly focus everyone's attention. But when a critical off-topic point is made by one of the panelists, it may (or may not) be productive to pursue that point. The moderator must decide. As for a moderator, we're biased but we think you should hire one. It's impractical for a moderator employed by your company to have the necessary objectivity to do a good job. The usual problem of group discussions must be faced: Some will tend to dominate the discussion while others may prefer to hang back. It's the moderator's job to draw out all the participants, especially those known to be expert on the immediate topic of discussion. Finally, note-taking is a great challenge in any free-flowing interchange. We strongly urge that you record the proceeds for later detailed review.

### Biases

Since people are involved, biases will emerge. Participants may hold some irrational views, may be seeking a future advisory or clinical-study role, or may be fixated on their particular practice or patient population. Biases need not be exposed during the meeting, but they must be accounted for later when distilling insights from the panel's proceedings. And your agenda is biased, too. Allow the panelists to set you straight by focusing on the issues that really matter.