

PHARMACIST FOCUS GROUP ABOUT QUALITY OF MEDICINES AND RELATED ISSUES

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Introduction

- Medicine quality is commonly defined in terms of laboratory agreement with pharmacopoeial specifications.
- Medicine quality problems can be either counterfeit or substandard according to the World Health Organisation.
- Limited research has been conducted to investigate perceptions about medicine quality and related problems worldwide and none in Saudi Arabia.

Purpose

The aim of this study was to generate a wide range of views, attitudes and behaviour regarding medicine quality issues in Saudi Arabia from the perspective of pharmacists and their experiences with patients. Additionally, findings from this focus group study have informed the question design for subsequent interview and questionnaire studies.

Method

- A single focus group session with five qualified pharmacists from Saudi with at least one-year practical experience was conducted.
- All participants were MSc/PhD Pharmacy and Pharmacology student at the university of Hertfordshire in the year 2013/2014.
- The focus group meeting was video taped within the University of Hertfordshire settings following participants' informed consent and was concluded within 95 minutes.
- Questions were asked in English and arranged in a specific order where general questions were asked first and questions regarding specific issues such as counterfeits were asked at the end.
- Relevant data were analysed thematically using a systematic strategy for focus group analysis (figure 1).

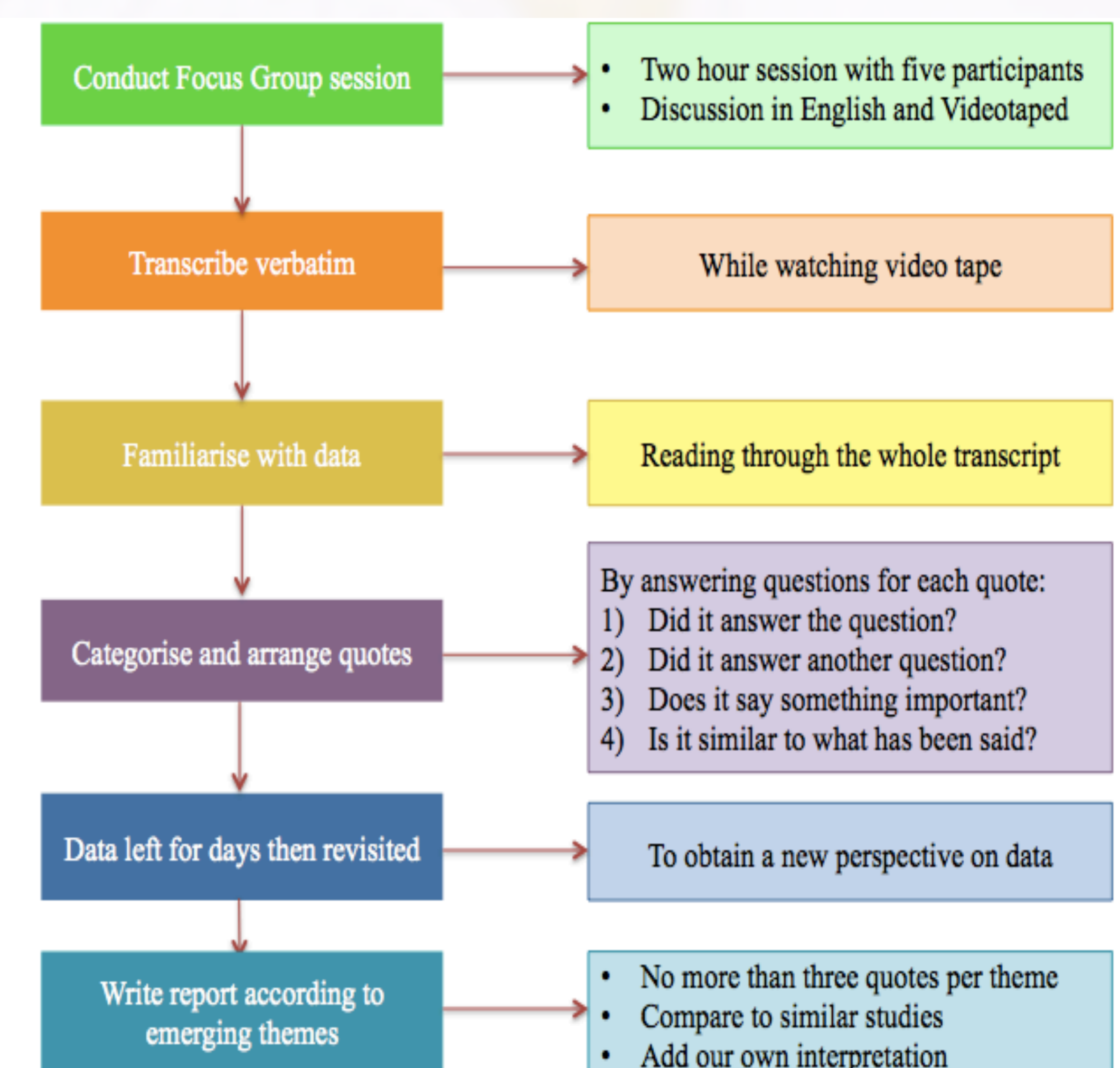


Figure 1: Focus Group data analysis process (Krueger and Casey, 2009)

Results

- Three male and two female Saudi pharmacists from various healthcare settings participated in this study.
- Findings from this study informed the questions design for future studies with different stakeholders (table 1).
- Eight themes emerged from the focus group session (table 2).

Action	Details
Added questions to future studies	How many times a year do you come across medicines with doubtful quality? What medicine therapeutic class are you mostly concerned with in terms of quality? What type of medicine formulation are you mostly concerned with in terms of quality? What type of medicine issues are you mostly concerned with in your settings?
Deleted questions from future studies	What is a substandard medicine? What is the prevalence of substandard medicines? What are the causes of medicine quality problems? What is the impact of medicine quality problems?
Arabic translation of technical terms	The term "counterfeit" in English was translated by the group into "maghshoosh" in Arabic

Table 1: Added and deleted questions based on findings

Theme	Key Findings and quotes
Definition of a good quality medicine	A. Has a good effect B. Package appearance is appropriate C. Accepted by patients D. From a reliable source E. Appropriate medicine formulation and dosing frequency F. Is in a well-regulated market G. Has a reasonable price
Perception about medicine quality in Saudi Arabia	A. Pharmacists in this study had a generally positive perception about medicine quality in Saudi Arabia B. Some patient and physicians were reported to have trust in only branded medicines
Challenges to medicine quality in Saudi Arabia	A. Improper medicine storage and transportation conditions B. Extreme weather conditions C. Centralised laboratory testing of medicine samples in the country D. Healthcare providers in Saudi procure medicines from different sources
Experiences with questionable quality medicines	"I worked in the Hajj season and I have seen lots of samples from the wide world. Especially from India and Africa is bad quality and it looks like there is a lot of counterfeiting there" (ph 1) "we received vitamin D drops... It was really bad quality... it does not give any effect to the patient" (ph 5) "one IV injection but can't remember its name, there was rubber inside" (ph 5)
Relationship between medicine price and quality	"as a general impression with all the products not just medicines, you associate good quality with high price..." (ph 2)
Pharmacists' practices to ensure good medicine quality	A. Visual checks particularly for medicine expiry dates B. Send suspected medicine sample to the centralised laboratory for analysis C. Ensure appropriate temperatures for medicine storage
Impact of medicines with quality problems.	"I think it is waste of money and health as well... the other thing that it could break the trust of the patient, if that happens once to a patient, he will never trust anything again from this hospital" (ph 2)
Recommendations to improve current policy and procedures	A. Random post-marketing medicine sample analysis B. Governments to issue high punishment laws for manufacturers of poor quality medicines C. More research on medicine quality and perceptions of different stakeholders D. Improve the reporting systems of medicine quality problems

Table 2: Themes and quotes from the study

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate a possible difference in perceptions between pharmacists, patients and physicians about the quality of the available medicines in Saudi Arabia. Some experiences with medicine quality problems were shared among group members. Adding areas of concern and deletion of areas of consensus in subsequent studies was achieved for the purpose of our study. Moreover, it was possible to translate the English term "counterfeit" to "maghshoosh" in Arabic for future studies. However, the term "substandard" was found to be complex by the participants and therefore was deleted from subsequent questions for future studies.

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