

Characteristics, Policies, and Practices of Clinical Ethics Fellowship Programs

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Introduction

- While clinical ethics fellowship programs are now commonplace in U.S. hospitals, recent research has revealed significant problems including a shortage of personnel who are appropriately trained to perform ethics consultation, lack of access to high quality training for ethics consultants, and lack of funding for clinical ethics training.¹
- Our goal was to accurately describe the characteristics, policies, and practices of existing clinical ethics fellowship programs in the U.S. and Canada as well as the opinions of clinical ethics fellowship program directors regarding program standards, accreditation, and funding through a robust questionnaire.
- This project focused specifically on the development of a cognitive interviewing protocol designed to refine the questionnaire that would be used to measure core constructs of fellowship programs.

Aims and Objectives

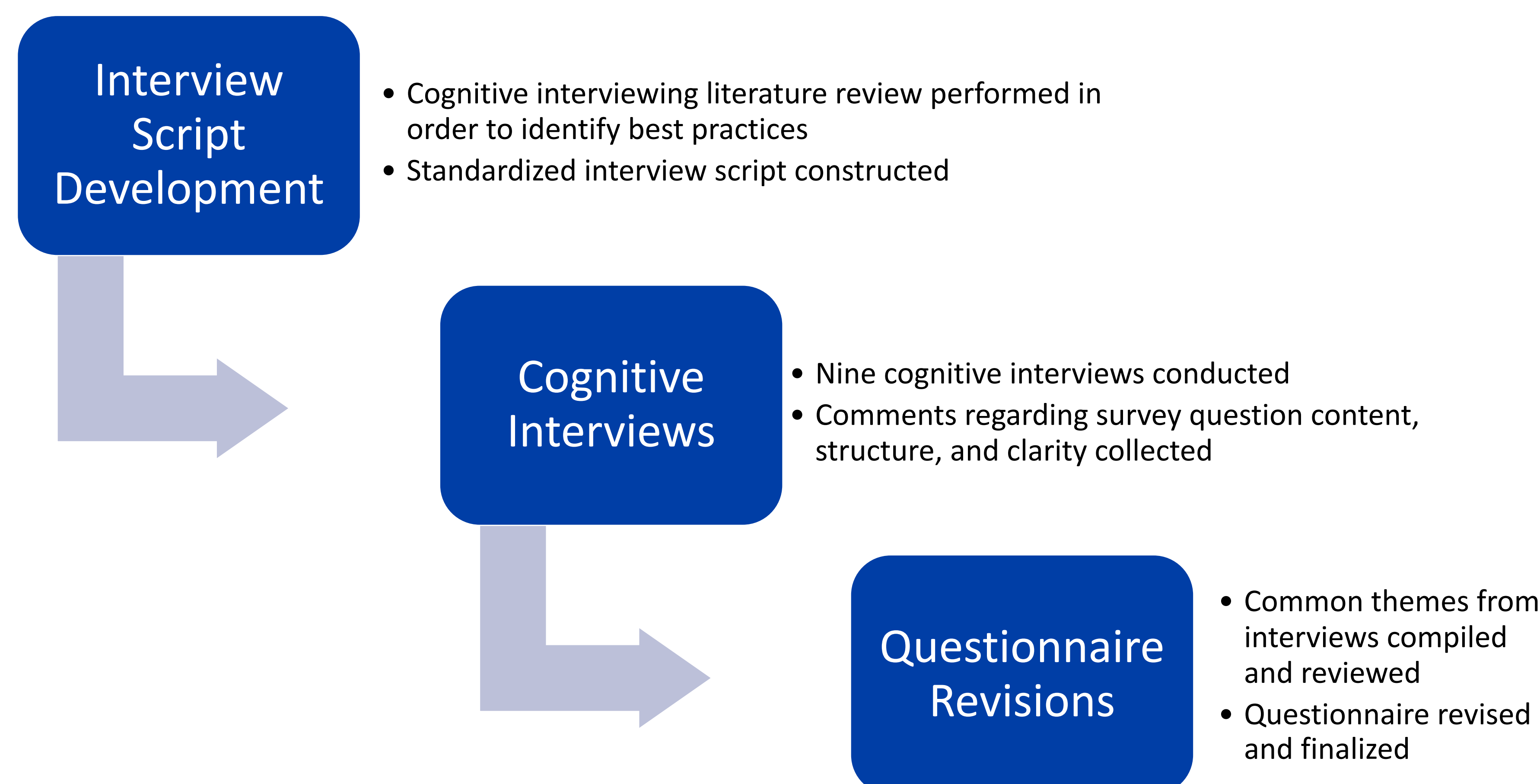
- Conduct a comprehensive review of existing cognitive interviewing literature in order to identify best practices and methodologies of effective cognitive interview protocol design.
- Develop a set of targeted, evidence-based questions designed to assess the clarity, comprehensibility, and consistency of meaning in questionnaire.
- Analyze and synthesize data gathered from cognitive interviews in order to refine questionnaire towards greater clarity for population who will take it.

Methods

- Comprehensive literature review of cognitive interviewing techniques was performed to create a standardized interview script.^{2,3}
- The interview script consisted of relevant questions to interrogate questionnaire clarity and meaning consistency.
- Interviews were scheduled with individuals who had backgrounds similar to the expected study participants but were not expected to participate.

Results

- Nine cognitive interviews were conducted using the interview script. Qualitative data regarding question content, structure, and clarity was transcribed during each interview.
- Common themes were then compiled and reviewed for iterative refinement of the questionnaire. Themes included the desire for increased definitions within question stems (e.g. defining “clinical ethics fellowship track” when respondents are asked if their program offers tracks) and clarification of time frames (e.g. distinguishing between calendar year vs. academic year).
- The final questionnaire included 12 Likert-style questions (two of which contained eight subparts each) and five open-ended questions assessing opinions about accreditation and funding of clinical ethics fellowship programs.^{4,5}



Conclusions

- The cognitive interview process in this study allowed for researchers to identify and correct misconceptions found within initial versions of the questionnaire.
- By ensuring that each survey question fulfilled its intended purpose, the finalized questionnaire form was best able to capture the array of characteristics, policies, and practices of clinical ethics fellowship programs across the U.S. and Canada.
- We anticipate that results of the survey can be used to establish both interest in and need for federal funding of clinical ethics fellowships, as well as interest in an accreditation program for clinical ethics fellowships.^{4,5}

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