

Direct Observation Study: Methods and Design

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Objective: Describe methods and design of a Direct Observation Study of general practice focused on preventive service delivery. **Methods:** (*Participants*) 120 practices from 22 Ohio counties in the Ohio Dental Practice Research Network. This preliminary report includes 73 practices. (See prelim Table) Participants were similar to all Ohio dentists on distribution of age, sex, and years in practice. 2269 patient visits were observed. 296 patients declined to be observed. (*Study Design*) Over 16 months, 2 trained observation teams of 2 experienced hygienist researchers and a patient intake coordinator visited 120 practices for 4 days to directly observe dentist and hygienist patient visits, review dental records and billing data and administer patient and provider surveys. Using the Dental Davis Observation Code (DOC), an adapted standard instrument for observing behaviors in clinical practice, teams recorded 24 standard practitioner behaviors at 30 second intervals. For DOC standardization, observers independently coded behaviors while viewing taped dental visits. Procedure checklists were completed and office environments characterized. Qualitative notes enriched the observation.

Results:

Participant Characteristics N=73 practices, (mean ± SD)

	DDS (n=75)	RDH (n=80)		DDS (n=75)	RDH (n=80)
Age	49.41 (9.76)	40.92 (9.32)	Perceived Observer Effect		
Sex				None	94.6%
Male	81.3%	1.2%	Somewhat	5.4%	7.5%
Female	18.7%	98.8%	A lot	0%	2.5%
Race			Length of Visit (Median Time)		
Caucasian	89.3%	97.5%		19 minutes	37 minutes
African American	6.7%	2.5%	Practice Size (# of dentists in practice)		
Other	4.0%	0%		(1) 55%	(2) 32% (3+) 13%

Conclusions: A Direct Observation study of general dental practice was conducted in Ohio providing a comprehensive dental practice database. This unique data set provides the capability to answer questions about what *actually* happens in dental practice.

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