

Honorarium Protocol for Participation in the Pennsylvania Quality Service Review Process

Overview

Honorarium for participation in scientific research studies in the United States is a common and long-standing practice that has been documented for well over 100 years.¹ A form of honorarium is offered for the inconvenience, time and effort taken to participate in research. Honorarium can take the form of cash, checks, gift certificates, toys, food, reimbursement for travel expenses, babysitting fees, compensation for time, and small gifts or gift cards, depending on institutional rules and regulations. The offering of honorarium is often associated with increased participation, faster participation and lower costs of executing a survey when compared to control groups without an incentive offer.

Ethical Considerations

Honorarium for voluntary family participation in the Quality Service Review process is not considered a benefit; rather, it should be considered a gift for participants' time and any inconvenience associated with participation in the QSR process. Honorarium should not be sizeable enough to induce families to agree to participate, regardless of how minimal the risk.

Tax Information

Receipt of an honorarium may be considered taxable income to the participant regardless of the dollar amount. All payments made to any single individual (for US citizens and permanent residents) in any single calendar year that aggregate to \$600.00 or more must be reported to the Internal Revenue Service. For nonresident aliens, the institution is required to report these payments (regardless of amounts) for proper tax collections purposes. However, tangible gifts are not taxable.

Goals of Honorarium

Any method of incentivizing voluntary participation should be designed to achieve the following goals:

- Ensure the confidentiality of participants;
- Provide timely, convenient compensation to participants as a means of gratitude for their voluntary participation;
- Provide sufficient financial documentation for the institutional records that honorarium was provided for voluntary participation in the review process; and
- Ensure that appropriate internal controls and adequate safeguards exist for items of value used.

¹ <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1159153/pdf/JCI0525694.pdf>

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Honorarium Procedures

- 1) Each county may decide whether or not to grant any form of honorarium to a family for voluntary participation in the QSR process, including interview and focus group participation. If the county decides to gift family participants, the county will communicate the decision in writing to the respective state lead and OCYF liaison assigned to that county prior to the start of the QSR process.
- 2) Honorarium is limited to birth family members and not given to paid providers, including paid kinship caregivers, foster parents or private provider agency staff.
- 3) Acceptable forms of honorarium for families that voluntarily agree to participate in the QSR process are limited to non-monetary gifts, including gift cards and tangible gifts (such as food items, entertainment tickets.)
- 4) The amount of the honorarium should not exceed \$50.00 per family. If families are spread across more than one household and those families agree to participate in the QSR process, each family may receive a gift.
- 5) County personnel assigned to obtain consent from family members for QSR participation are required to request agreement to participate without reference to receiving an honorarium. Once the family member voluntarily agrees to participation in the process, the scheduler is then permitted to reference the as a gift for the family's time and possible inconvenience for their voluntary participation in the process.
- 6) Once at least one of the scheduled family interviews occurs, the County lead approves the honorarium for the family's involvement which is then mailed to the family head of household.
- 7) Counties may consider purchase of food for various QSR activities, including consumer participation in focus groups.