



Developing Invitation Messages that Increase Survey Response Rates

**A Webcast Presented by the AHRQ CAHPS User Network
September 10, 2019
1:00 – 2:00 pm ET**

Our Focus Today

- Subject lines and messages in emails to increase the rate of survey returns via the web
- Wording to motivate completion of open-ended survey questions

Today's Speakers



- **Caren Ginsberg, Ph.D., CPXP**, Director, CAHPS Division, Center for Quality Improvement and Patient Safety, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality



- **Jack Fowler, Ph.D.**, Center for Survey Research, University of Massachusetts Boston



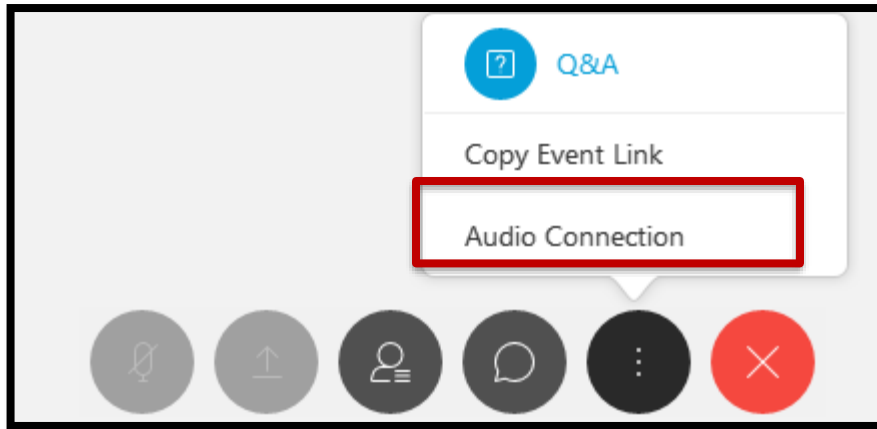
- **Dale Shaller, M.P.A.**, Shaller Consulting Group, Stillwater, MN



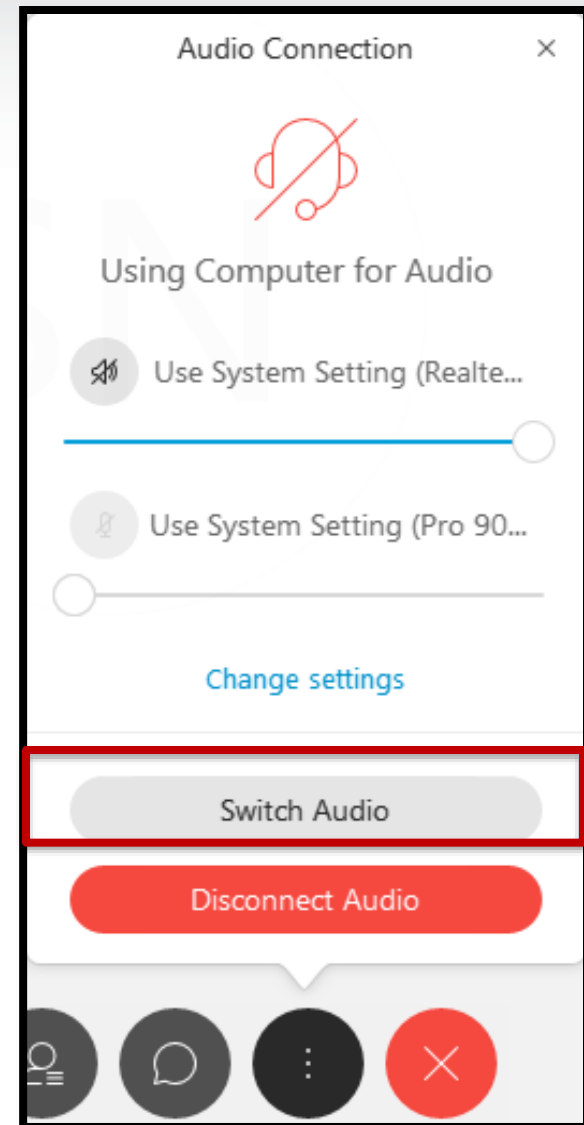
- **Julie Brown**, RAND, Santa Monica, CA (Moderator)

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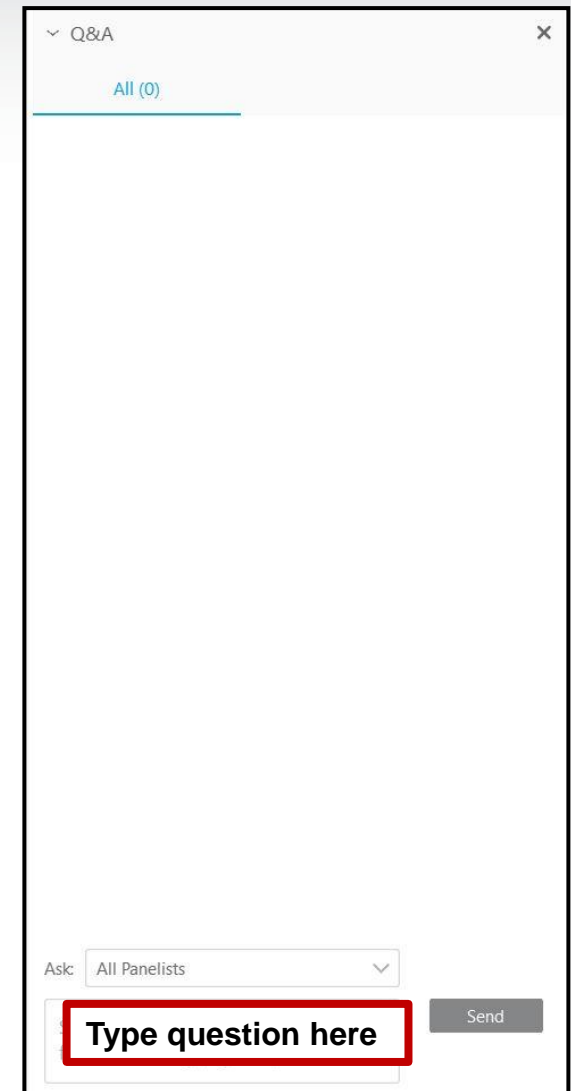
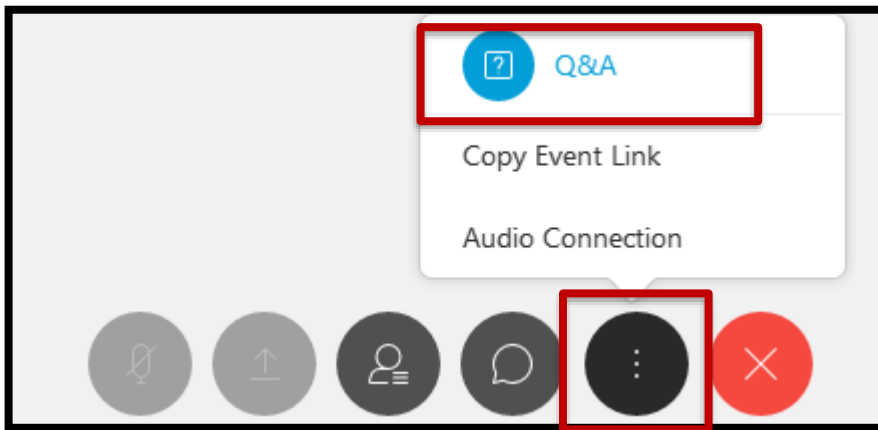


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- Other problems?
 - ▶ Use Q&A feature to ask for help



How to Submit Questions

- Question and Answer
 - ▶ Select the icon with three dots
 - ▶ Select Q&A
 - ▶ Type question in the box that opens



AHRQ'S CAHPS® PROGRAM

**Caren Ginsberg, Ph.D., CPXP,
Director, CAHPS Division**

Center for Quality Improvement & Patient Safety, AHRQ

AHRQ's Core Competencies

- **Health Systems Research:** Invest in research and evidence to make health care safer and improve quality.
- **Practice Improvement:** Create tools for health care professionals to improve care for their patients.
- **Data & Analytics:** Generate measures and data to track and improve performance, and evaluate progress of the US health care system.

The AHRQ CAHPS Program

- CAHPS = Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems
- Program advancing the understanding, measurement, and improvement of patients' experiences with their health care
- Initiated and funded by AHRQ since 1995

- The CAHPS program
- ▶ Conducts research to further...
 - our understanding of patient experience of care
 - our knowledge of measuring PE and collecting PE data
 - informative reporting of patient experience data
 - Quality improvement involving CAHPS
- ▶ Develops surveys and related materials to assess PE in health care settings, and with health plans and providers

CAHPS Surveys: Patient Focus

- CAHPS surveys are the gold standard for patient experience measurement.
- The CAHPS program captures the patient's voice.
- Surveys measure patient experience of care in different settings, with health plans and with providers.
- Surveys are developed using standardized methodology and research findings.

Goal of Survey Administration

Survey responsiveness

Survey representativeness

Many factors can influence survey responsiveness and representativeness. Today's presentation discusses one such important determinant.

EMAIL MESSAGING TO INCREASE WEB SURVEY RESPONSE RATES

JACK FOWLER, Ph.D.

First, want to thank

- Carol Cosenza
- Philip Brenner
- Lauren Cripps

- For their work on this project

Goals

Two essentials steps to a successful web survey are getting respondents to **open the e-mail request** and getting them to **click on the URL** and do the survey.

For that reason, we wanted to learn more about responses to:

- ▶ Subject lines
- ▶ Content of invitation letters

First steps

- Convened 3 focus groups of people who had seen a doctor within the previous 6 months
- Asked them to discuss and rate:
 - ▶ Sample subject lines
 - ▶ Sample content in invitation letters

Web Survey

- Using a national web panel, we then identified 300 members who had seen a doctor in the previous 6 months and asked them to rate slightly edited versions of what the focus groups had discussed.

Ratings of subject lines

- Pick the three subject lines that you would be most likely to open.
- Pick the three subject lines that you would be least likely to open.

Subject lines (worst)

- This is your chance to make a difference
(38% in bottom 3)
- You know something we need to know
(53% in bottom 3)
- PLEASE HELP
(63% in bottom 3)

Subject lines(best)

- How did you like your medical care?
(40% in top 3)
- What can your doctor's office do better?
(44% in top 3)
- Tell us how you felt about your recent visit to your doctor's office.
(57% in top 3)

Messages in invitation letter

- Pick the four messages that would be least likely to encourage you to do the survey.
- Pick the four messages that would be most likely to encourage you to do the survey.

Least helpful messages

- If you choose not to participate, this will not affect the health care you get from your providers. *(38% in bottom 4)*
- The accuracy of the results depends on having a high percentage of those in the sample responding. *(36% in bottom 4)*
- We have hired an independent professional survey organization to conduct the survey. *(35% in bottom 4)*

Very least helpful message

If you don't respond, we will underestimate the number of people who see things as you do.

(58% in bottom 4)

Best messages

- We carefully review the results of the surveys to figure out how to provide better service and care to our patients. *(44% in top 4)*
- Your answers are confidential. No one will link your answers with your name. *(45% in top 4)*
- We are committed to providing you with the best quality health care available, and your input will help us achieve this goal. *(46% in top 4)*

And the clear winner

We want to know:

- how easy it was for you to make appointments and get care
- how well you felt treated
- whether you felt listened to
- how clearly doctors explained what you need to know

These are the kinds of things that only you can tell us.
(58% in top 4)

Subject lines are best to the extent they:

- Communicate who is asking
- Say what is being asked
- Give some clue as to what good it might do

Takeaways

Invitation letter pluses include:

- Address concerns about downsides
- Communicate why it might be worth person's effort to respond
- Communicate what is in the survey: questions are sensible, respondents can answer them, answers actually might be of use to doctors' offices

Limitations

- Of course, these are thoughts and feedback from people who were not actually being surveyed by their doctors. May not generalize to actual respondent behavior

Evidence of validity

- Convergence of results from focus groups and web panel supports notion that the responses have meaning.
- When we looked at ratings across age, gender, education and ethnicity, while the percentages differed some, almost all groups picked the same subject lines and messages as the most popular.

Next step

Do a field test applying what we think we learned.

THANK YOU

Wording to Encourage Completion of Open-Ended Survey Questions: Results of Two Pilot Studies

Dale Shaller, M.P.A

Overview

- Two pilot studies examined completion rates of the CAHPS Narrative Item Set added to the CAHPS Clinician & Group (CG-CAHPS) Survey.
- Both studies were conducted as part of the Massachusetts Health Quality Partners (MHQP) annual statewide survey.
- The aim of the studies was to identify effective wording of transition messages for motivating respondents to complete a series of open-ended questions placed at the end of the core survey.

CG-CAHPS Narrative Item Set

A **structured series** of 5 open-ended questions that:

- Prompts survey respondents to tell a **clear and comprehensive story** about their experience with a provider and his/her office staff
- **Complements** the closed-ended survey questions
- Provides **value-added information** helpful to both patients and clinicians

2015 Pilot Study

- Narrative Item Set was placed at end of CG-CAHPS short form survey administered by web (through email and letter invitations)
- Transition wording:

Would you like to provide additional comments about your experiences with this doctor?
Respondents were given a yes/no option. If they answered “yes”, they saw the following:

Your answers will never be matched with your name, but you should be aware that any comments you provide to us may be seen by your doctor, healthcare managers, or anyone else involved in your care and treatment. Your comments are an opportunity for you to provide more detailed feedback about the care, treatment, and services you receive from your doctor. This information can then be used to help your doctor and healthcare managers know what is working well and/or what may need improvement.

Do you still wish to write a comment? *Respondents were given another yes/no response option. If they answered “yes”, they saw the following:*

Disclaimer:

Your comments cannot be used to seek or obtain medical care or advice of any kind. You should not use your comments in place of a visit, phone call, or to seek advice from your doctor. **If you think you have a medical emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department immediately.**

2015 Pilot Study Results

- A total of 2,459 sampled patients responded to the survey version with the Narrative Item Set.
- Of the total:
 - ▶ 17.2% answered at least one of the open-ended questions
 - ▶ 82.8% did not choose to leave a comment

2017 Pilot Study

- Narrative Item Set placed at end of CG-CAHPS Survey with Patient-Centered Medical Home (PCMH) items
- Administered by web
- Respondents were randomly assigned to receive one of three invitations to complete the open-ended questions:
 1. Modified short encouragement
 2. Enhanced short encouragement
 3. No encouragement



Screenshot of Narrative Items in MHQP's 2017 Pilot

In Your Own Words

Please answer the following questions to provide detailed feedback about the care, treatment, and services you receive from your provider. Healthcare providers value comments from their patients because these details tell them what is working well and what may need improvement.

Please do not use your comments in place of a visit or phone call, or to seek advice from your provider. Your comments may be reported publicly but will never be matched to your name.

What are the most important things that you look for in a healthcare provider and the staff in his or her office?

When you think about the things that are most important to you, how do your provider and the staff in his or her office measure up?

Now we'd like to focus on anything that has gone well in your experiences in the last 12 months with your provider and the staff in his or her office. Please explain what happened, how it happened, and how it felt to you.

Next we'd like to focus on any experiences in the last 12 months with your provider and the staff in his or her office that you wish had gone differently. Please explain what happened, how it happened, and how it felt to you.

Please describe how you and your provider relate to and interact with each other.

Submit

Modified Short Encouragement

In Your Own Words

Please answer the following questions to provide detailed feedback about the care, treatment, and services you receive from your provider. **Your provider can use this information to know what is working well or what may need improvement.**

Please do not use your comments in place of a visit or phone call, or to seek advice from your provider. Your comments may be reported publicly but will never be matched to your name.

Enhanced Short Encouragement

In Your Own Words

Please answer the following questions to provide detailed feedback about the care, treatment, and services you receive from your provider. **Healthcare providers value comments from their patients because these details tell them what is working well and what may need improvement.**

Please do not use your comments in place of a visit or phone call, or to seek advice from your provider. Your comments may be reported publicly but will never be matched to your name.

No Encouragement

In Your Own Words

In your own words, please describe your experiences with this provider and his or her office staff, such as nurses and receptionists.

If you need medical advice or care, please contact your provider's office. These comments may be shared with your provider and may be reported publicly.

2017 Pilot Study Results

- A total of 706 sampled patients responded to the web version of the MHQP survey.
- Of these, 663 completed the last closed-ended question that preceded the invitation to complete the Narrative Item Set.
- Completion rates by wording version:
 1. Modified short encouragement: 73.7%
 2. Enhanced short encouragement: **77.3%**
 3. No encouragement: 60.5%

Conclusions

- Invitation wording matters
- Less is more
 - ▶ Long, dense, cautionary wording with a “gate” question led to much lower completion rates
 - ▶ Short, direct, positive wording increased completion rates more than threefold
- Wording emphasizing that providers value patient comments appears to be especially effective.

Foundations in Prior Research

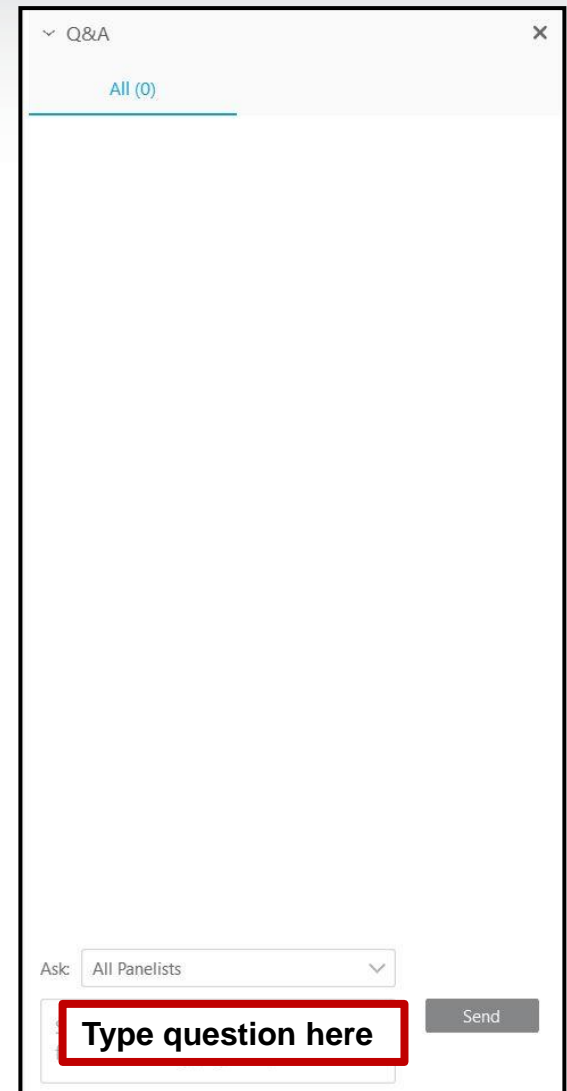
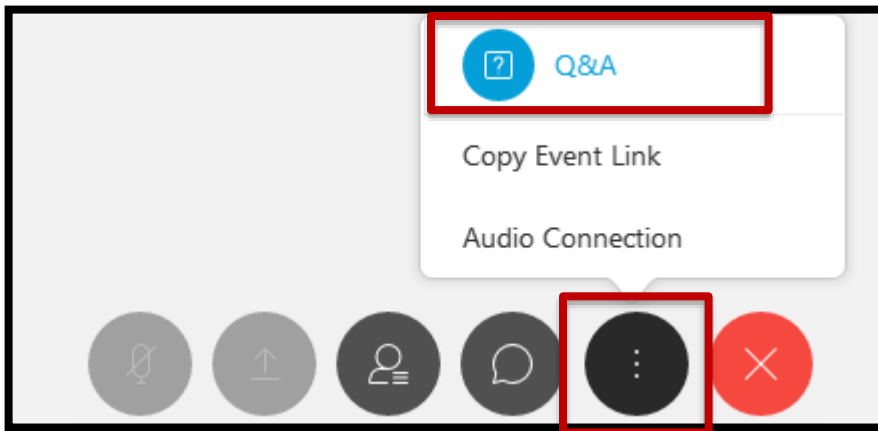
- Today's presentations build on prior research
 - ▶ History of CAHPS research to inform survey wording and approach to survey invitations
 - Visit the CAHPS bibliography at www.ahrq.gov to find research findings
 - ▶ September 2018 AHRQ Research Meeting, “Advances in Survey Methodology: Maximizing Response Rates and the Representativeness of CAHPS® Survey Data”
 - Visit the News and Events page at www.ahrq.gov for information on this event
 - ▶ Key practices found in the literature on survey invitations
 - Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J. D., & Christian, L. M. (2014). *Internet, Phone, Mail, and Mixed-Mode Surveys: The Tailored Design Method*.
 - Fazekas, Z., Wall, M.T., & Krouwel, A. (2014). Is it what you say, or how you say it?
 - Edwards, P.J., Roberts, I.G., Clarke, M.J., DiGuseppi, C., Wentz, R., Kwan, I., et al. (2007). Methods to increase response rates to postal questionnaires.

Findings Reflect Key Practice

- ▶ Email subject lines and email message content
 - Concise wording, clear communication of importance of information to provider and its use to improve care delivery
 - As indicated in Jack's presentation and published literature
- ▶ Principles apply to completion of narrative questions
 - Dale's presentation links clear communication of importance of information to provider and its use to improve care delivery to increased completion rates for narrative questions

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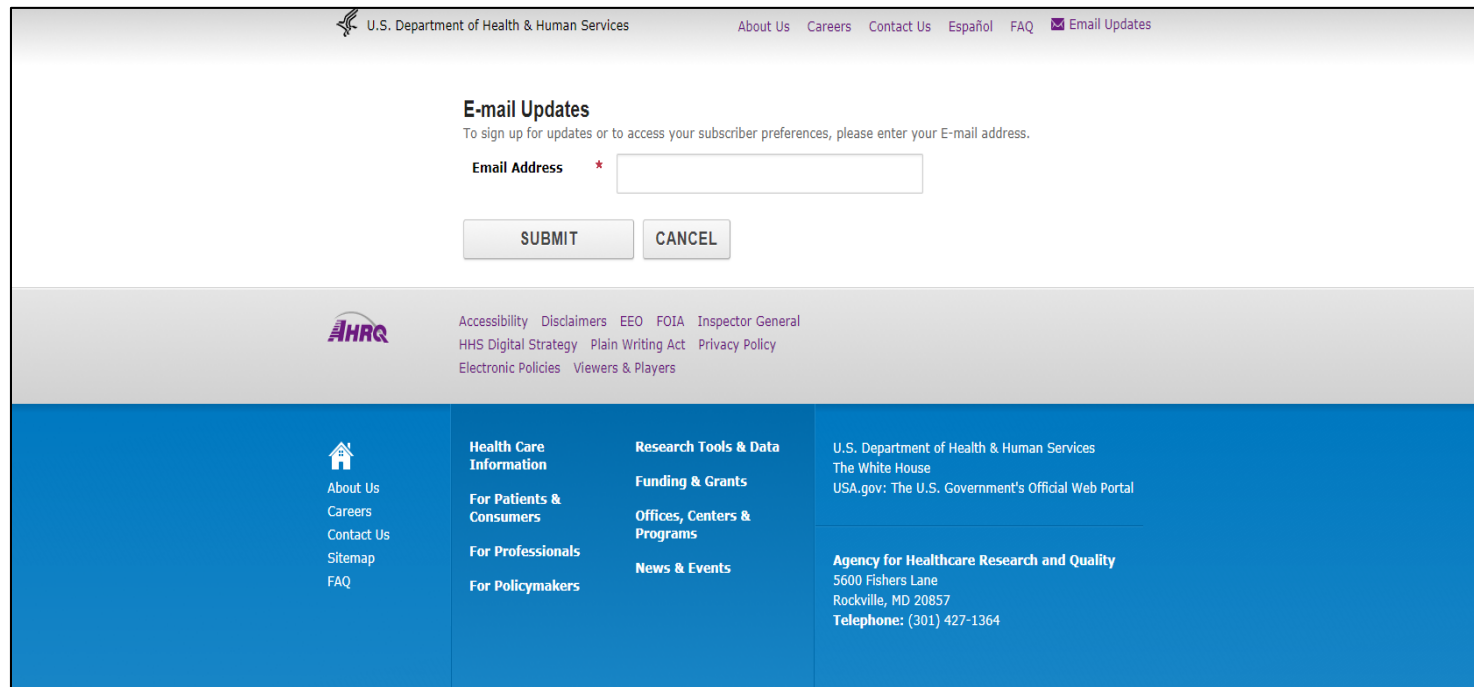


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