



Nominal Group Technique- Plain Language Summary

How are health care treatments developed?

Before explaining about the Nominal Group Technique, it's helpful to first outline how healthcare treatments are developed.

To help patients, doctors and other health professionals make decisions about treatments, we need evidence about what works best. Treatments are developed and tested by researchers in clinical trials to make sure they work and are safe. To do this, researchers need to look at the effects those treatments have on patients. Researchers do this by measuring 'outcomes'. For example, in a clinical trial of how well a new asthma treatment works, 'outcomes' might include:

- A measure of how fast you can blow air out of your lungs
- Night time wheeze
- Asthma quality of life measure

How is it decided what outcomes are important to measure in clinical trials?

When researchers design clinical trials to investigate treatments they need to measure outcomes that are important and relevant to those people affected by the condition. To decide which outcomes are important, researchers need to get everyone's opinion and try to reach agreement, or 'consensus', on the most important outcomes. To do this, some researchers use a method called the Nominal Group Technique. Basically, this involves a range of people who are experts in the health condition meeting up together to discuss and agree on the outcomes. These experts include:

- People with personal experience of the condition, for example, patients, informal carers and service users. Their opinion is incredibly valuable.
- Health professionals who are experts in treating and caring for people with the condition, such as doctors, nurses, physiotherapists.

- Other experts, such as researchers and health service decision makers.

What happens in meetings where the Nominal Group Technique is used?

Meetings that use the Nominal Group Technique can be run in many different ways. We present two examples of the process here. Example A, which is the most common approach, is when the Nominal Group Technique is used to gain consensus at the final stage of the outcomes study. Example B describes the Nominal Group Technique being used earlier in the outcomes study to explore which outcomes are important.

Example A

- Some work will already have been done to try to find out about important outcomes. For example, the researchers will usually have reviewed which outcomes have been used for the condition in previous clinical trials. The research team may also have interviewed patients to find out which outcomes are important to them, and may have run surveys with different groups of experts (including patients, carers and service users) to find out what each group felt were important outcomes.
- Around 20-30 experts take part in a full day face-to-face meeting. The experts are usually a sub-group of the people who have taken part in the previous surveys.
- A facilitator leads the meeting explaining how the voting for outcomes will be done and how to do the scoring. Participants are provided with small electronic keypads for voting in the meeting.
- The facilitator presents the results from the earlier surveys for each outcome. The facilitator will make it clear which outcomes the survey participants felt to be highly important (or not). The facilitator will also make it clear which of the groups thought the outcome was highly

important and flag up any major differences between the groups.

- Participants in the meeting are either asked to work individually, or are split into small groups or pairs to consider their views of the outcomes, including any outcomes that they feel are missing.
- All the participants are then brought together to discuss each outcome in turn. The facilitator makes sure that everyone is happy with their understanding of the outcome and encourages discussion about how important the experts think the outcome is. The discussion continues until everyone who wishes to express their views has had a chance to do so.
- Each participant is then asked to vote anonymously using an electronic keypad.
- Once people have scored each outcome, and providing they broadly agree on the level of importance, the research team will identify each outcome as either 'critical', 'important but not that critical' or 'not that important' to measure in future clinical trials. If the participants cannot agree, further discussion and re-voting may take place.
- The final agreed critical outcomes are described as the 'core outcome set'.

Example B

- Around 6-10 experts take part in a two-hour face-to-face meeting.
- Participants are asked to write down which outcomes are important to them.
- The outcomes that participants write down are given to a facilitator who copies them onto a flip chart so that the whole group can see the outcomes. Participants are encouraged to ask questions at this stage so that everyone has the same understanding of each outcome.
- Once everyone is happy with their understanding, the group discuss each outcome

to work out if some of the outcomes on the flip chart overlap and so can be combined. For example, in psoriasis (a skin disease) burning, stinging and itching can be combined in the outcome 'skin pain'.

- When all outcomes on the flip chart have been discussed and everyone has had a chance to give their perspectives, participants are asked to review the entire list and to score each outcome in terms of how important they feel it is. The facilitator will explain to everyone exactly how to do the scoring.
- Once everyone has scored each outcome, the facilitator adds up everyone's score for each of the outcomes to give a total score for each outcome. Everyone can see all the scores that each outcome gets and the total score.
- There may be a final discussion to go over any of the outcomes where participants give very different scores for a given outcome.
- The outcomes scored as the most important at the nominal group meeting are then presented in surveys with a larger group of patients, health care professionals and researchers. This is to make sure a wider group of people agree that the outcomes are important for future research.

Why use a Nominal Group Technique?

Using a Nominal Group Technique helps to ensure that all participants have the opportunity to provide their perspectives and to hear the perspectives of others. Everyone will have the chance to give their opinion on each outcome discussed, but if someone feels their views on an outcome have already been covered in the discussion, they should not feel they have to say something. It's absolutely fine to pass. Hearing everyone's perspectives and engaging in discussion is essential to building a consensus.