Response Shift: The Measurable and Desired Outcome of Chronic Disease Self-management Programs That Violates Pre–Post Assessment

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In-depth interviews (n = 39) and mailed questionnaires (n = 132) reflected that a “true” response shift occurred in about half of the questionnaire items. Of these, 33% had a negative response shift, 18% had a positive response shift, and approximately 32% had no response shift. The presence or absence of response shift could not be determined in approximately 17% of cases. Substantial concordance between interview and questionnaire were observed (average overall accuracy 0.79), indicating the questionnaire effectively identified response shift. A positive or negative response shift was found to have profound effects on patient-reported outcomes — even large positive or large negative program effects revealed in an interview could be concealed in an individual’s pre–post score. This clearly demonstrates that response shift can violate classic outcome assessment of self-management programs.

Response shift occurred in about half of the participants. This result suggests that classic outcome assessment (pre-test vs post-test) in many individuals is flawed. Response shift is a desirable outcome of courses but has not been formally measured. The strong concordance between the questionnaire and cognitive interviews indicates the HEI-
Q-Perspective can detect response shift. This new questionnaire will assist researchers and program evaluators to better estimate the impact of self-management programs and to understand the role of response shift in this and other settings.

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