

New National Survey Shows Almost a Third of Second Medical Opinions Result in Different Treatments

Contributed by Harris Interactive
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ROCHESTER, N.Y. â€“ March 17, 2005 â€“ More than a quarter (29%) of U.S. adults report that they or a member of their family received a second medical opinion from a doctor in the past five years. In the majority of cases, this second opinion either confirmed the initial diagnosis or treatment (54%), or while different, did not change the treatment (16%). However, in fully 30 percent of cases where a second opinion was obtained, the diagnosis differed from the original, and as a result, the treatment or care was different from what it would have been without the second opinion.

These are some of the results of a Harris Interactive? online survey of 2,137 U.S. adults conducted between March 4 and 8, 2005 for The Wall Street Journal Onlineâ€™s Health Industry Edition.

Of those who received a second medical opinion from another doctor, half (50%) said that they obtained one because they wanted to have as much information as possible. Other reasons for getting a second opinion included:

- The diagnosis was very serious (38%);
- The doctor who made the initial diagnosis suggested a second opinion (34%);
- Was not confident about the initial diagnosis (34%);
- There were several treatment options to choose from (25%);
- Did not trust the doctor who made the initial diagnosis (16%);
- The initial diagnosis was confusing (13%);
- Health insurance required a second opinion (10%); and
- Some other reason (9%).

Of the 71 percent of all adults and their families who have not received a second opinion from another doctor in the past five years, the most common reasons for deciding not to get one were that they trusted the doctor who made the diagnosis (39%) and that they felt confident about the initial diagnosis. Nearly (46%) said that a second opinion from another doctor just wasn't necessary.

TABLE 1
EVER HAD A SECOND OPINION?

"Has there been a time in the past five years when you or a member of your family was diagnosed with a medical problem for which you got a second medical opinion from another doctor?"

Base: All Adults

?

Total

?

%

Yes, received a second opinion from another doctor

29

No, did not receive a second opinion from another doctor

71

TABLE 2

REASONS WHY A SECOND OPINION WAS OBTAINED

"Patients and their family members get second opinions for a variety of reasons. Why did you/your family member decide to get a second opinion on the last occasion this happened?"

Base: Received a Second Opinion from Another Doctor

?

Total

?

%

Wanted to have as much information as possible

50

The diagnosis was very serious

38

The doctor who made the initial diagnosis suggested a second opinion

34

Was not confident about the initial diagnosis

34

There were several treatment options to choose from

25

Did not trust the doctor who made the initial diagnosis

16

The initial diagnosis was confusing

13

Health insurance required a second opinion

10

Some other reason

9

Note: Multiple-response question.

TABLE 3
EFFECT OF SECOND OPINION

"The last time you/your family member received a second opinion, which of the following best describes what happened?"

Base: Received a Second Opinion from Another Doctor

?

Total

?

%

The second opinion confirmed the first diagnosis or recommended treatment.

54

The Second Opinion Was Different (NET)

46

The second opinion was different and, as a result, the treatment or care was different from what it would have been without the second opinion.

30

The second opinion was different in some way but it did not change the treatment and care.

16

TABLE 4
REASONS FOR NOT GETTING SECOND OPINION

"Patients and their family members decide not to get a second opinion for a variety of reasons, why did you/your family member decide not to get a second opinion?"

Base: Did Not Receive a Second Opinion from Another Doctor

?

Total

?

%

Trusted the doctor who made the initial diagnosis

39

Felt confident about the initial diagnosis

33

Could not afford to pay for a second opinion

7

Health insurance would not pay for a second opinion

6

There wasn't enough time to get a second opinion

4

Did not know where to go for a second opinion

4

The doctor who made the initial diagnosis said a second opinion wasn't necessary

2

A second opinion just wasn't necessary

46

Some other reason

19

Note: Multiple-response question.

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Q905, Q910, Q915, Q920

Downloadable PDFs of Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Polls are posted at http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/newsletters_wsj.asp.

Methodology

This poll was conducted online in the United States between March 4 and 8, 2005 among a nationwide cross section of 2,137 adults aged 18 and over. Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, income and region were weighted where necessary to align with population proportions. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

In theory, with probability samples of this size, one could say with

95 percent certainty that the results for the overall sample have a sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points. Sampling error for the results of adults or their family members who received a second opinion in the past five years (664) is plus or minus 6 percentage points and for the results of adults or their family members who have not received a second opinion in the past five years (1,473) is plus or minus 4 percentage points. Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in polls or surveys that are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. This includes refusals to be interviewed (nonresponse), question wording and question order, and weighting. It is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors. This online sample was not a probability sample.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

About the Survey

The Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Poll is an exclusive poll that is published in the award-winning Health Industry Edition of The Wall Street Journal Online at www.wsj.com/health.

About The Wall Street Journal Online

The Wall Street Journal Online at WSJ.com, published by Dow Jones & Company (NYSE: DJ; www.dowjones.com), offers authoritative analysis, breaking news and commentary from top industry journalists. Launched in 1996, the Online Journal is the largest paid subscription news site on the Web, with more than 689,000 subscribers world-wide. The Online Journal provides in-depth business news and financial information 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with insight and analysis, including breaking business and technology news and analysis from around the world. It draws on the Dow Jones network of more than 1,500 reporters and editors -- the largest staff of business and financial journalists in the world. For the second consecutive year in 2003, the Online Journal received a WebAward for the "Best Newspaper Web Site" and was also cited by Yahoo! Internet Life magazine as the "Best Business News" site (2002 & 2001).

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About Harris Interactive?

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EOE M/F/D/V

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