In Good Hands?

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When it comes to our health, we usually seek only what we believe to be the best advice.

Does this only come from our doctors, however?

Are there other sources of information that we can effectively rely on?

Synovate asked respondents which sources of health information they used. Overall, the three most popular are:

1. GP / Family Doctor / Physician / Public health doctor (69%) - The Netherlands led here with 88%, followed by Australia (86%) and Belgium (85%). The lowest were Korea 34%, Hong Kong 39%, USA 62%

2. Specialist Doctor / General health specialist (34%) - Taiwan took the lead with 75%, followed by Korea (61%) and Germany (55%). The lowest were Hong Kong 7%, Indonesia 12%, UK 17%

3. Pharmacist / Chemist (29%) Australia is highest with 70%, Belgium 58%, and Germany 52%. The lowest were Hong Kong 6%, Indonesia 7%, Serbia 8%.

Explains Bob Douglas, Global Head of Synovate Healthcare:
"To some extent this will reflect the Healthcare structures in individual countries and ease of access. For example, in Holland and the UK, the GP is the gatekeeper to Healthcare. Holland showed the highest percent (88%) going to see a GP for health related advice and the UK was one of the lowest in terms of those seeking advice from a specialist.

"The role of the pharmacist in providing advice on healthcare is extremely varied. In Australia 70% claim to seek advice from a pharmacist whilst in Hong Kong the figure is a mere 6%. The role of the pharmacist is set to change radically in terms of diagnosis and treating, and this data suggests that acceptance and uptake of this type of initiative will be received very differently in different countries."

Overall, 46% worry about taking any medicines that haven't been prescribed by a doctor. At market level, the UAE felt most strongly (64%), followed by Singapore (63%) and Hong Kong (61%).

Similarly, 42% of people globally disagree that they would prefer to obtain their medications over the counter, rather than through their doctor. This was led by Serbia and Taiwan, both with 71%.

Forty percent of people globally say they worry that OTC sales assistants are not experienced enough to recommend products and 43% do not trust the advice of pharmacists, particularly in Hungary (89%), Belgium (85%) and France (81%).

So it seems, overall, that our trust and therefore our preference for treatment, lies with our doctors.

However, there are some markets that have more trust in the pharmacist's advice, including UAE (70%), Germany (67%) and Hong Kong and Serbia, both with 66%.

"These results confirm the strong position pharmacies have in these countries, not only as sales channels but as consultants too," said Thomas Schafer, Associate Director for Synovate in Germany.

What about online health information?
With the huge rise in online communities, it would seem that health would surely be a popular topic.

Chat sites were the fourth most popular source of health information, with 20% of respondents selecting them.

Perhaps even more interesting is the split between regions, with Asian markets Taiwan (48%) and Korea (36%) being much higher than European markets such as Spain (2%), France and the UK (both 4%).

Is this a clear demonstration of the difference in attitudes towards health sites and their influence on everyday life in these markets?

This is something that brands in these markets might benefit from being aware of.

Commented Douglas:

"Overall, we see clearly the significance of the internet as a source of healthcare information not only in terms of published information but also through the use of social networking sites. These results underlie the importance of social networking which has major implications for communication strategies. It is not surprising to see some of the Asian markets taking a lead, as they tend to embrace technology more readily than the more conservative Western countries."