Adults Believe Healthcare Quality Can be Fairly Assessed

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A new Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Poll shows that many U.S. adults believe it is fair to assess healthcare quality, but they are ambivalent and confused about whether or not payments to doctors and hospitals should be linked to quality metrics. Half of all adults (49%) believe there are fair and reliable ways to measure and compare the quality of care provided by different hospitals and medical groups.

Many U.S. Adults Believe Healthcare Quality Can be Fairly Assessed, but Few Willing to Pay Significantly Higher Premiums for Superior Care

ROCHESTER, N.Y. â€“ April 4, 2006 â€“ A new Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Poll shows that many U.S. adults believe it is fair to assess healthcare quality, but they are ambivalent and confused about whether or not payments to doctors and hospitals should be linked to quality metrics. Half of all adults (49%) believe there are fair and reliable ways to measure and compare the quality of care provided by different hospitals and medical groups. However, only one in five (19%) adults think it would be fair for patients to pay more to be treated by medical groups or hospitals that have been shown to provide better care, and fewer adults (14%) say they themselves would be willing to pay a significantly higher premium for such care.

These are some of the results of a Harris InteractiveÂ® online survey of 2,123 U.S. adults conducted between March 20 and 22, 2006 for The Wall Street Journal Onlineâ€™s Health Industry Edition.

One-third (33%) of all adults favor health insurance plans paying more to hospitals and medical groups that have been shown to provide better care and paying less to those that have not. This is down from 44 percent in 2003. At the same time, the percentage of adults who are uncertain about this has increased, with over half (54%) currently saying they are unsure, compared to 40 percent in 2003.

Adults are less likely today (49%) than they were three years ago (58%) to think there are fair and reliable ways to measure and compare the quality of care provided by different hospitals and medical groups. In addition, many (57%) adults donâ€™t think it would be fair for patients to pay more, and 55 percent say they would not be willing to pay a significantly higher premium themselves to be treated by medical groups or hospitals that have been shown to provide better care.

Fairness of Specific Methods Used to Evaluate Healthcare Quality

When asking about various methods healthcare plans could use to measure and compare quality of care provided by medical groups, more than two-thirds (69%) of adults think it would be fair to do this by using patient satisfaction surveys. Other methods for measuring quality that substantial numbers of adults believe would be fair to use include:

Medical tests that measure how well doctors are managing patients with chronic medical conditions (61%)
Assessments by third party organizations that monitor healthcare quality (57%)
Frequency of preventive screening tests (55%)
Electronic medical records and other information tolls (47%)
Malpractice suits (41%)
Between one-fifth and one-third of adults are not sure whether or not they think these six specific methods for measuring and comparing the quality of care provided by medical groups are fair.

Katherine Binns, President of the Healthcare and Public Relations Research Practice at Harris Interactive, comments: "To the extent that the public understands the concept of assessing quality, many feel itâ€™s fair to use a variety of metrics to do so; these range from third party assessments and medical test results for patients with chronic medical conditions to patient satisfaction surveys. What they donâ€™t want to see, however, is health plans charging more for access to high quality providers and they donâ€™t want to see doctorsâ€™ getting paid more or less based on quality ratings."

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

Methodology

Harris InteractiveÂ® conducted this online survey within the United States between March 20 and 22, 2006 among a national cross section of 2,123 adults, ages 18 years and over. Figures for age, gender, 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 overall results have a sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points of what they would be if the entire U.S. adult population had been polled with complete accuracy. Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in all polls or surveys that are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. They include refusals to be interviewed (non-response), question wording and question order, interviewer bias, weighting by demographic control data and screening (e.g., for likely voters). It is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors. This online sample is 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), is the largest paid subscription news site on the Web. Launched in 1996, the Online Journal continues to attract quality subscribers that are at the top of their industries, with 768,000 subscribers world-wide as of Q4, 2005.

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 nearly 1,900 business and financial news staff-the largest network of business and financial journalists in the world. The Online Journal also features exclusive content, including interactive graphics on business and world news, and online-only columns about the automotive industry, technology, personal finance and more.

The Online Journal offers three industry-specific verticals: the award-winning Health, Media & Marketing and now Law. Health offers authoritative analysis, breaking news and commentary from top industry journalists. Media & Marketing is designed for professionals in the advertising, marketing, entertainment and media industries. Law is designed to provide law firms and attorneys timely information on events and trends important to the legal market. Subscribers to all also get access to the full content of the Online Journal.

Â In 2005, the Online Journal was awarded a Codie Award for Best Online News Service for the second consecutive year, and its Health Industry Edition was awarded Best Online Science or Technology Service for the third consecutive year. In 2004, the Online Journal received an EPpy Award for Best Internet Business Service over 1 million monthly visitors.

The Wall Street Journal Online network includes CareerJournal.com, OpinionJournal.com, StartupJournal.com, RealEstateJournal.com and CollegeJournal.com.

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Harris Interactive Inc. (www.harrisinteractive.com), based in Rochester, New York, is the 13th largest and the fastest-growing market research firm in the world, most widely known for The Harris PollÂ® and for its pioneering leadership in the online market research industry. Long recognized by its clients for delivering insights that enable confident business decisions, the Company blends the science of innovative research with the art of strategic consulting to deliver knowledge that leads to measurable and enduring value.

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To become a member of the Harris Poll OnlineSM and be invited to participate in future online surveys, go to www.harrispollonline.com.