
Executive Summary

Background

On behalf of Pfizer Inc, and the newly established Pfizer Medical Humanities Initiative, the independent research firm Yankelovich Partners was commissioned to conduct research regarding the patient-physician relationship. Initial focus groups were conducted in the Fall of 1997 to help determine the key issues facing both patients and primary care physicians with regard to their interactions and their relationships. Based upon this insight, Yankelovich conducted a national survey on these same issues.

Survey Objectives

- Establish a benchmark on the current state of the patient-physician relationship
- Determine the strengths and areas for improvement within the patient-physician relationship
 - Ascertain aspects to preserve, and to improve, for the future
- Discover the characteristics of the ideal relationship for the future

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Rationale

- The patient-physician relationship always has been and must remain at the heart of American health care
- Recent surveys have indicated that the patient-physician relationship was in a decline
- Societal trends, such as the increased access to worldwide health care information and a busier, more demanding public, have placed a greater strain on the patient-physician relationship

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Survey Methodology

Throughout December 1997, Yankelovich Partners interviewed 401 general health doctors and 1,567 U.S. citizens age 21 and older.

- Interviews were approximately 20 minutes in length, and were conducted using a Random Digit Dialing (RDD) technique to ensure sample quality
- Doctors who participated in the study were required to meet the following qualifications:

- Internist/Internal Medicine, Family Practitioner, or General Practitioner
- In practice at least 5 years
- Under 65 years old
- Have an office-based practice

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Demographic Profiles

- Physicians
 - Average Age: 48.5 years
 - Gender: 85% male, 15% female
 - Average Years in Practice: 17.4
 - Type of Practice: 50% Internal Medicine, 36% Family Practice, 14% General Practitioner

Demographic Profile: Doctors

<u>Age</u>	<u>Total</u> %
30 - 34	2
35 - 39	12
40 - 44	20
45 - 49	26
50 - 64	40
Average	48.5 yrs

<u>Type of Practice</u>	<u>Total</u> %
Internist/Internal Medicine	50
Family Practitioner	36
General Practitioner	14

<u>Gender</u>	<u>Total</u> %
Male	49
Female	51

<u>Majority of Practice</u>	<u>Total</u> %	<u>Years in Practice</u>	<u>Total</u> %
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I own my own private practice	55
I am part of a group of private practice physicians, either multi-specialist or general practice	29
I work for a facility or clinic funded by Medicaid, or another government program	6
I am salaried by a managed care organization, or HMO	5
I am part of an academic faculty practice	2
Other	3

5 - 10	24
11 - 15	23
16 - 20	24
21 or More	29
Average	17.4 yrs

- Patients
 - Average Age: 45.7 years
 - Gender: 49% male, 51% female
 - Median Income: \$35,900
 - Education: 89% high school graduate or more

Demographic Profile: Patients

<u>Age</u>	<u>Total %</u>
21 - 24	7
25 - 29	11
30 - 34	12
35 - 39	12
40 - 49	21
50 - 64	19
65 or Older	18
Average	45.7 yrs

<u>Education</u>	<u>Total %</u>
8th Grade or Less	4
Some High School	7
High School Graduate	35
Some College	23
College Graduate	20
Postgraduate Study	10
Refused	1

<u>Family Income</u>	<u>Total %</u>
Less than \$20,000	20
\$20,000 - \$34,000	22
\$35,000 - \$49,999	19
\$50,000 - \$74,999	15
\$75,000 - \$99,999	6
\$100,000 or More	5
Refused/No Answer	13
Median (000's)	\$35.9

<u>Marital Status</u>	<u>Total %</u>
Married	58
Single, Never Married	20
Divorced/Separated	12
Widowed	9
Refused	1

<u>Kids Under 18 in HH</u>	<u>Total %</u>
Yes	40
No	58
Refused/No Answer	2

<u>Race</u>	<u>Total %</u>
White	75
Black	11
Asian	1
Hispanic	9
Other	2
Refused/No Answer	2

<u>Gender</u>	<u>Total %</u>
Male	49
Female	51

<u>Have Chronic Illness</u>	<u>Total %</u>
Yes	16
No	82
Not Sure	2

Summary of Findings

Overall, the state of the patient-physician relationship is healthier than other recent surveys or conventional wisdom would have had us believe. Patients are satisfied with their physicians and the service that they provide. In addition, patients state that they have had an ongoing relationship with the same doctor for an average of seven years. Similarly, physicians acknowledge having long-term relationships with the majority of their patients.

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Patient Satisfaction

Contrary to common wisdom, the majority of patients are pleased with their doctors – more so than the doctors expected.

- About 60% of patients say they are "extremely" or "very" satisfied with their doctors' accessibility, follow-up, and communication
- Doctors, somewhat surprisingly, underestimate the extent to which their patients are satisfied with these same aspects of their health care

-How doctors communicate with them: 64% of patients are "extremely" or "very" satisfied, compared to physicians estimating that only 46% of patients would respond as favorably

-Follow-up after an office visit, such as calling to inform a patient of test results: 61% of patients are "extremely" or "very" satisfied, vs. physicians estimating that only 52% of patients would respond as favorably

-Doctors' accessibility: 57% of patients are "extremely" or "very" satisfied, vs. physicians estimating that only 49% of patients would respond as favorably

-Even when evaluating duration of office visits, 53% of patients say they are "extremely" or "very" satisfied, compared to the physician impression that only 39% of patients would be as satisfied

- 15% or less of patients were "not very" satisfied or "not at all" satisfied with their doctors in each of the above areas

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Long-Term Relationships

Despite the mobile nature of our society and changes in the health care system, both patients and physicians report having ongoing relationships with one another. The fact that both sides strive to develop long-term relationships demonstrates the importance of the human element in health care.

- 81% of patients surveyed said they have had an ongoing relationship with the same physician, for an average of seven years
- Similarly, 62% of physicians state that they have ongoing relationships with 90% or more of their patients

Doctors and patients both agree that the old model of physicians as authority figures who control the relationship no longer applies in today's evolving health care environment. In fact, 95% of both doctors and patients describe the ideal patient-physician relationship as a mutual partnership.

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Patient Education

Doctors (96%) and patients (92%) believe that in the future patients should be educated about their own health problems and possible treatment options. Patients look to various sources for their information.

- A majority of patients (89%) receive their medical information from doctors
- Other key sources used by patients include books (72%), family/friends (69%), and the consumer media (60%)
- Reflecting the increased popularity of computer technology, nearly one in five (18%) use the Internet as a source of medical information. Also, the majority of both doctors (59%) and patients (53%) believe that beyond any other influencers, technology has most benefited medicine

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Future Relationship

The continued success of the patient-physician relationship will depend, in part, on doctors' and patients' willingness to adjust to changing roles as a new relationship model of mutual partnership emerges in the health care environment. The partnership is envisioned as either a:

- Mutual partnership between patient and physician (55% of physicians and 46% of patients)

or as a:

- Mutual team partnership that includes other physicians and allied health professionals in a collaborative effort (40% of physicians and 49% of patients)

Regardless of the changes in health care, a clear majority of physicians (72%) said with absolute certainty that they would still become physicians, if given the choice to do things all over again. An additional 5% were undecided.

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Characteristics of the Ideal Relationship: Doctors

In describing doctors today, patients more often stated that their physicians were polite (90% vs. physicians reporting themselves at 82%) and patient (74% of patients vs. 58% of physicians).

- Fairly equal numbers of patients and physicians described physicians as articulate (80% and 84% respectively) and trusting (80% and 82% respectively)
- Doctors were more critical of themselves than patients were with regard to being hurried (88% vs. patients at 65%)

Looking to the future, doctors and patients agree that two of the most important qualities a physician can have are the ability to diagnose disease quickly and accurately (doctors 87% vs. patients 92%), and compassion (doctors 98% vs. patients 90%).

- Approximately 75% of patients say they already have the compassionate physician that 95% of patients describe as the ideal

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Characteristics of the Ideal Relationship: Patients

As for describing the ideal patients of the future, both physicians and patients agree that the three most important patient characteristics are:

- Being open, honest, and thorough (95% of both physicians and patients)
- Taking an active interest in their health care beyond just complying with medical advice (91% of physicians, 89% of patients)
- Always keeping track of names of medications currently taking (88% of physicians compared with 95% of patients)

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Demographics of Patient Satisfaction

Satisfaction varied little between patients in different demographic groups.

Gender

- *How doctors communicate with them:* 62% of males vs. 66% of females are "extremely" or "very" satisfied

- *Follow-up after an office visit, such as calling to inform a patient of test results:* 59% of males vs. 63% of females are "extremely" or "very" satisfied
- *Doctors' accessibility:* 53% of males vs. 59% of females are "extremely" or "very" satisfied
- *Duration of office visits:* 49% of males and 56% of females are "extremely" or "very" satisfied

Race

- *How doctors communicate with them:* 70% of African Americans, 63% of whites and 69% of Hispanic patients are "extremely" or "very" satisfied
- *Follow-up after an office visit, such as calling to inform a patient of test results:* 72% of African Americans, 60% of whites and 64% of Hispanic patients are "extremely" or "very" satisfied
- *Doctors' accessibility:* 61% of African Americans, 56% of whites and 58% of Hispanic patients are "extremely" or "very" satisfied
- *Duration of office visits:* 62% of African Americans, 52% of whites and 54% of Hispanic patients are "extremely" or "very" satisfied

Insurance

- *How doctors communicate with them:* 68% of private insurance vs. 64% of HMO users are "extremely" or "very" satisfied
- *Follow-up after an office visit, such as calling to inform a patient of test results:* 65% of private insurance vs. 60% of HMO users are "extremely" or "very" satisfied
- *Doctors' accessibility:* 63% of private insurance vs. 56% of HMO users are "extremely" or "very" satisfied
- *Duration of office visits:* 57% of patients with private insurance and 54% of HMO users are "extremely" or "very" satisfied