

Consumer and Physician Knowledge of Drug Quality

Performer: WebMD

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Regulatory Science Challenge

Patients may contemplate the efficacy and safety of a drug when considering treatment, but they may not think about the quality of a drug. Also, patients may have different concepts of “quality.” To one person, “quality” may refer to the shape and consistency of the pills, while another thinks about “quality” in terms of purity. In addition, patient trust of generic drug quality varies. Several studies have found, for example, that consumers from lower educational and socioeconomic levels trust generics less. Thus, understanding and assessing a drug product’s quality is very challenging for patients.

Project Description

WebMD will conduct an approximately 10-minute survey of its consumer visitors to measure their understanding of and attitudes toward drug product quality for prescription and OTC drugs. The survey will address what drug quality means to consumers and whether they have an understanding of basic drug product manufacturing quality, the FDA’s role in drug quality regulation and drug approval, and how manufacturing quality can affect drug approval. The analysis will determine whether consumer views toward drug quality differ by demographics, prior knowledge of FDA quality processes, personal use of therapeutic drugs, and other factors.

A second survey, with questions similar to the consumer survey, was sent to physician subscribers via Medscape.

Project Goals

- Analyze consumers’ and physicians’ perceptions of prescription drug quality with regard to prescription branded, prescription generic, and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs.
- Evaluate whether perceptions of drug quality differ by demographic attributes.
- Gain insight into patient and physician awareness of the FDA’s role as the agency that regulates manufacturing quality and whether this awareness influences perceptions of drug quality.

Project Results

The final report of the researchers to the FDA included the following results:

- The majority of consumers surveyed rated the overall quality of brand-name and generic prescription medications, and OTC medications as excellent or very good.
- Consumers 50 years of age or older were more likely to rate prescription drugs (brand name and generic) as “excellent,” compared to those younger than 50.
- Consumers who have experienced difficulty filling a prescription due to a drug shortage were less likely to rate prescription and OTC drug quality as “excellent” or “very good.”
- Physicians rated the quality of drugs as high. Physicians were more likely than consumers to rate brand name and generic drugs as comparable.
- Compared to consumers, physicians were better informed about the role of FDA regarding drug quality.