

Lack of Trust in Both FDA and Pharmaceutical Companies Makes Drug Safety a Concern for Many

They believe the FDA and pharmaceutical companies should bear the most responsibility for drug safety, but are skeptical that they can be trusted to do so

In a recent survey by Harris Interactive people were asked for their opinions regarding institutions responsible for drug safety in the United States. We found that institutions believed to have the greatest responsibility in drug safety are often those that are least trusted to do so. Among a list of four entities integral to drug safety –The Federal Drug Administration (FDA), pharmaceutical companies, doctors and other healthcare providers, and Congress – people identified the FDA and pharmaceutical companies as the entities that should bear the most responsibility for drug safety in the United States today. However, when asked about their corresponding levels of trust in these entities, both fared poorly. Furthermore, people are skeptical that pharmaceutical companies will release information, positive or negative, about the safety of their products. Doctors and other healthcare providers, on the other hand, were also seen as bearing a high amount of responsibility for drug safety, but unlike the FDA and pharmaceutical companies, healthcare providers received high trust ratings.

These are some of the results of a nationwide survey of 1,726 adults interviewed online between October 20 and October 30, 2006. The survey was conducted for the Pharmaceutical Safety Institute. The survey was designed to represent the general public, except that it excluded people who work in the health care industry, for a regulatory agency or who are health care providers.

Entities Responsible for Drug Safety

Substantial majorities believe the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and U.S. pharmaceutical companies should bear the most responsibility for regulating the safety of prescription drugs in the United States. These two entities were deemed to bear a greater responsibility for drug safety than healthcare professionals and the Congress of the United States. However, large numbers of people still feel both of them also share responsibility for drug safety.

- 60% of people believe the U.S. FDA has a great deal of responsibility for prescription drug safety.
- 53% of people believe U.S. pharmaceutical companies have a great deal of responsibility for prescription drug safety.

- 30% of people believe U.S. healthcare professionals have a great deal of responsibility for prescription drug safety.
- 22% of people believe the Congress of the United States has a great deal of responsibility for prescription drug safety.

In addition, substantial numbers believe these four groups have “quite of bit” of responsibility.

Table I
Responsibility for Drug Safety

In your opinion, how much responsibility do you think each of the following groups has in regulating the safety of prescription drugs in the United States today?

Base: All Adults*

	A great deal	Quite a bit	A fair amount	Some	None
	%	%	%	%	%
The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)	60	15	13	6	2
U.S. pharmaceutical companies	53	17	15	9	3
U.S. health care professionals	30	25	21	15	5
Congress	22	19	24	18	11

*Excluding people who work in the health care industry, for a regulatory agency or who are health care providers.

Levels of Trust with Regulating Entities

In light of recent reports of adverse reactions related to some frequently used prescription drugs, large numbers of people report that they do not trust the entities they identify as most responsible for ensuring drug safety.

- Only 45% of people somewhat trust or very strongly trust the U.S. FDA.
- Only 27% of people somewhat or very strongly trust pharmaceutical companies.
- Only 20% of people somewhat or very strongly trust Congress.

However, many more people, a 58% majority, somewhat or very strongly trust doctors or other professionals who prescribe drugs.

Table 2
Trust in FDA, Doctors, Drug Companies and Congress

There have been recent reports of potential adverse reactions related to some frequently used prescription drugs, such as Vioxx, Bextra, Celebrex, and Naproxen. Using the scale below, how would you describe your current level of trust associated with the following entities?

Base: All Adults*

	Very strongly trust	Some-what trust	Neither trust nor distrust	Some-what distrust	Very strongly distrust
	%	%	%	%	%
Doctors (or other health care providers) who prescribed the drugs	14	44	30	9	3
The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) that approved the drugs	9	36	29	18	9
Pharmaceutical companies that developed the drugs	4	23	32	27	15
Congress that makes the laws to govern the process	3	17	34	30	16

*Excluding people who work in the health care industry, for a regulatory agency or who are health care providers.

Confidence in Drug Companies to Release Information

Majorities of the public also do not have much confidence that drug companies will release or disseminate information they have regarding the safety of their drugs.

- Only 43% of people are fairly, very or extremely confident that drug companies will release any information about adverse reactions to their drugs, and
- Only 44% of people are fairly, very or extremely confident that drug companies will eventually disseminate all information – positive or negative – they have regarding drug safety.

Table 3

Confidence That Drug Companies Release All Relevant Information

Using the scale below, please indicate your level of confidence with each of the following statements.

Base: All Adults*

	Extremely confident	Very confident	Fairly confident	Some-what confident	Not at all confident
	%	%	%	%	%
Drug companies will release any information they have about the adverse reactions of any of their drugs as soon as they have such information.	4	10	29	26	31
Drug companies will eventually disseminate all information – positive or negative – that they have regarding the safety of their drugs.	4	10	30	27	29

*Excluding people who work in the health care industry, for a regulatory agency or are health care providers.

Conclusions

These Harris Interactive survey results show that substantial numbers of the public do not have confidence that it is adequately protected when it comes to drug safety. It is also evident that the entities people identify as most responsible for ensuring drug safety have a long way to go to win the public’s trust. People have little confidence that they will do all they can to protect the public from adverse reactions to prescription medications. This is particularly true for the two entities considered to be most responsible for drug safety, the FDA and pharmaceutical companies.

Methodology

This Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States between October 20 and October 30, 2006 among a nationwide cross section of 1,726 adults (aged 18 and over). The survey was designed to represent the general public, except that it excluded people who work in the health care industry, for a regulatory agency or who are health care providers. Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents’ propensity to be online.

All surveys are subject to several sources of error. These include: sampling error (because only a sample of a population is interviewed); measurement error due to question wording and/or question order, deliberately or unintentionally inaccurate responses, non-responses (including refusals), interviewer effects (when live interviewers are used) and weighting.

With one exception (sampling error) the magnitude of the errors that result cannot be estimated. There is, therefore, no way to calculate a finite “margin of error” for any survey and the use of these words should be avoided.

With pure probability samples, with 100 percent response rates, it is possible to calculate the probability that the sampling error (but not other sources of error) is not greater than some number. With a pure probability sample of 1,726 adults one could say with a ninety-five percent probability that the overall results have a sampling error of +/- two percentage points. However that does not take other sources of error into account. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

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

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