



Health Care Poll

EDITORS

National Survey Reveals Top Indicators of Quality of Medical Care

Insurance coverage is the biggest factor driving choices in doctors and hospitals

Recent results of The Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Poll show that American adults rank a very good reputation (55%) and a trusted doctor's recommendation (41%) as two of the three most important indicators of the quality of medical care they can expect from a hospital. Similarly, word of mouth is the most important indicator of the quality of medical care American adults expect from a medical doctor—notably, 65% base such quality on a very good reputation, 57% on a recommendation or referral from another trusted doctor and 56% on a personal recommendation from someone they know. However, when it comes to actually selecting a hospital or doctor, people primarily base their decisions on whether their choices are covered by their health insurance or not.

The most important indicators of quality of hospitals and the most important factors for choosing a hospital are (See Tables 1 and 2):

- While adults favor a very good reputation (55%) as the top indicator of the quality of medical care they can expect from a hospital, they rate a friendly, helpful and efficient staff (45%) as the second highest consideration, and third, a recommendation from a doctor they trust (41%).
- Interestingly, only 13% consider a good location an important indicator of quality of hospitals, with even fewer (8%) believing the buildings would need to be new or in good shape.
- When thinking about the last time they actually chose a hospital, 32% of respondents said they based their choice on whether the hospital accepted their insurance plan or not. This compares with 29% who said they chose a hospital based on a recommendation from a doctor they trusted and 24% who selected a hospital because it had a very good reputation.

The most important indicators of quality of doctors and the most important factors in choosing doctors are (See Tables 3 and 4):

- Majorities of all adults polled say that a very good reputation (65%), a recommendation from a doctor they trust (57%) and a personal recommendation from people they know (56%) are top indicators of the quality of medical care they can expect from a medical doctor.
- When thinking about the last time they chose a doctor, 46% of respondents said that the most important factor in deciding which doctor to use was that the doctor was part of their insurance plan, 36% said that the doctor was personally recommended by someone they knew, and 36% said that the doctor had a very good reputation.

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The survey also showed that high ratings of hospitals and doctors in published evaluations were not as important to the public as word of mouth or insurance coverage.

- A quarter of respondents (26%) said that highly rated published evaluations of hospitals are the most important indicators of the quality of medical care they can expect from a hospital.
- One in 10 of those surveyed (10%) said that highly rated published evaluations were one of the most important factors in choosing a hospital.
- One in five adults (20%) said that highly rated published evaluations are one of the most important indicators of the quality of medical care they can expect from a medical doctor.
- Highly rated published evaluations of doctors are among the most important factors to only 8% of respondents when they are thinking of choosing a doctor.

“What was most striking in these results was that insurance coverage was the biggest factor in driving people’s choices of doctors and hospitals,” says Humphrey Taylor, chairman of *The Harris Poll*®, Harris Interactive. “The hope is that solid, reliable and relevant measures of quality will become available in the future and that many people will use them.”

TABLE 1

Most Important Indicators of Quality of Hospitals

“In your opinion, which *three* of the following factors are the *most important indicators* of the quality of medical care you can expect from a *hospital*?”

Base: All adults

	Total
	%
It has a very good reputation	55
The staff are friendly, helpful and efficient	45
A recommendation from a doctor you trust	41
The best doctors work there	39
Personal recommendation from people you know	29
It has been highly rated in published evaluations of hospitals	26
It is an academic medical center or is affiliated with one	16
It is in a good location	13
The buildings are new or in good shape	8
Many successful and knowledgeable people use it	3
It is more expensive than other hospitals	*
None of these	1
Not sure/No opinion	4

*= Less than 0.5%

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TABLE 2

Most Important Reasons for Choosing a Hospital

“Thinking about the last time you or someone close to you chose a hospital, which *three* of the following factors were *most important* to you in making that choice?”

Base: All adults

	Total
	%
It accepts my insurance coverage	32
A recommendation from a doctor you trust	29
It has a very good reputation	24
The staff are friendly, helpful and efficient	20
It is in a good location	16
The best doctors work there	16
Personal recommendation from people you know	14
It has been highly rated in published evaluations of hospitals	10
It is an academic medical center or is affiliated with one	7
Many successful and knowledgeable people use it	3
The buildings are new or in good shape	2
It is more expensive than other hospitals	*
Neither I nor anyone close to me has been in a hospital for several years/Not applicable	22
I/We really don't have any choice	13
None of these	2

*= Less than 0.5%

TABLE 3

Most Important Indicators of Quality of Doctors

“In your opinion, which three of the following factors are the *most important indicators* of the quality of medical care you can expect from a *medical doctor*?”

Base: All adults

	Total
	%
He/She has a very good reputation	65
A recommendation or referral from another doctor you trust	57
Personal recommendation from people you know	56
The office staff are friendly, helpful and efficient	49
He/She has been highly rated in published evaluations of doctors	20
His/Her office is in a good location	14
His/Her patients include many successful and knowledgeable people	6
He/She has an attractive office in a good building	3
He/She charges higher fees than most other doctors	*
None of these	2
Not sure/No opinion	4

*= Less than 0.5%

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TABLE 4

Most Important Reasons for Choosing Doctors

“Thinking about the last time you chose a doctor, which of the following were *the three most important factors* to you in making that choice?”

Base: All adults

	Total
	%
He/She is part of my insurance plan	46
Personal recommendation from people you know	36
He/She has a very good reputation	36
A recommendation or referral from another doctor you trust	35
The office staff are friendly, helpful and efficient	27
His/Her office is in a good location	19
He/She has been highly rated in published evaluations of doctors	8
His/Her patients include many successful and knowledgeable people	3
He/She has an attractive office in a good building	1
He/She charges higher fees than most other doctors	*
Have not chosen a doctor for several years/Not applicable	21

*= Less than 0.5%

Methodology

This study was conducted online within the United States between July 24 and 28, 2003, among a nationwide cross section of 2,687 adults, ages 18 years and over. Figures for age, sex, race, education, region and 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.

In theory, with a probability sample of this size, one can say with 95 percent certainty that the results have a statistical precision of plus or minus three percentage points of what they would be if the entire 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 was not a probability sample.

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



THE
WALL
STREET
JOURNAL.
ONLINE

Health Care Poll

2 Volume

4 Issue

2003
August 14

About The Survey

The Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Poll is an exclusive poll that is published in the Health Industry Edition of The Wall Street Journal Online at www.wsj.com/health. The Health Industry Edition of The Wall Street Journal Online at WSJ.com, published by Dow Jones & Company, covers the business of health for health-industry professionals and features the award-winning coverage of The Wall Street Journal, breaking health news from Dow Jones Newswires and exclusive online commentary on the industry. The Wall Street Journal Online is the largest paid subscription news site on the Web with more than 671,000 subscribers. It recently received a Codie Award for Best Online Science/Technology/Medical Information Service and was named the “Best Business News” site by Yahoo! Internet Life in the magazine’s January 2002 issue.

About Dow Jones & Company

In addition to The Wall Street Journal and its international and online editions, Dow Jones & Company (NYSE: DJ; dowjones.com) also publishes Barron’s and the Far Eastern Economic Review, Dow Jones Newswires, Dow Jones Indexes and the Ottaway group of community newspapers. Dow Jones is co-owner with Reuters Group of Factiva, with Hearst of SmartMoney and with NBC of the CNBC television operations in Asia and Europe. Dow Jones also provides news content to CNBC and radio stations in the U.S.

About Harris Interactive®

Harris Interactive (www.harrisinteractive.com) is a worldwide market research and consulting firm best known for *The Harris Poll*®, and for pioneering the Internet method to conduct scientifically accurate market research. Headquartered in Rochester, New York, U.S.A., Harris Interactive combines proprietary methodologies and technology with expertise in predictive, custom and strategic research. The Company conducts international research through wholly owned subsidiaries—London-based **HI Europe** (www.hieurope.com) and Tokyo-based **Harris Interactive Japan**—as well as through the Harris Interactive Global Network of local market- and opinion-research firms, and various U.S. offices. EOE M/F/D/V

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

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