

The Portrait of a Modern Patient



What patients are looking for when it comes to choosing and staying with their doctors, and how educated they are about their doctors and themselves.

Over the past seven years, more than 20 million people have gained access to healthcare coverage thanks to the Affordable Care Act (ACA). With that coverage comes the option for patients to choose a doctor. Weatherby Healthcare, one of the nation's largest providers of locum tenens staffing, surveyed nearly 500 everyday healthcare consumers to find out what they look for in a physician and what would cause them to change doctors. The survey also examined how patients educate themselves about doctors, procedures, costs, health conditions, and more.

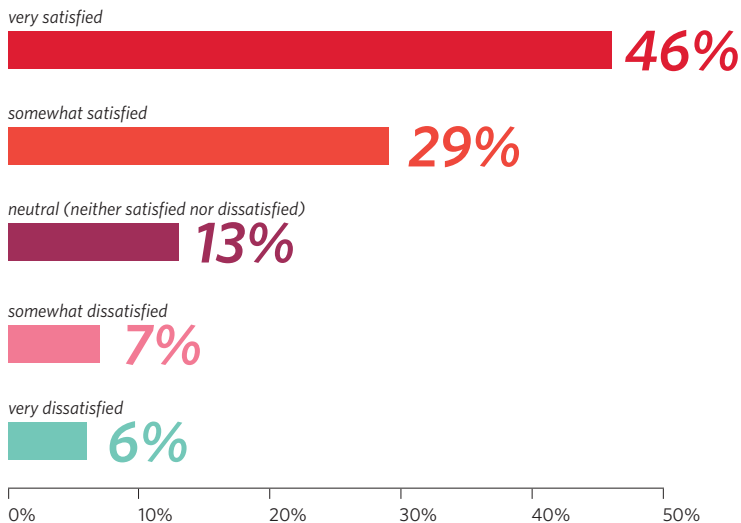
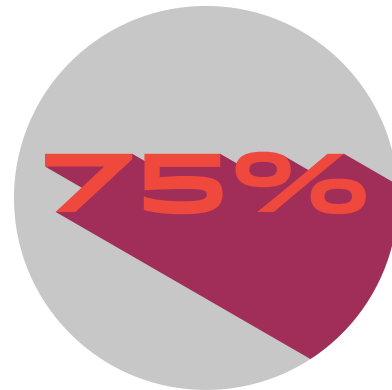
The survey found that, overall, patients are generally happy with their physicians and many stay with their doctor for a decade or more. When choosing a new doctor, they look for someone with experience, competence and a positive attitude. Cost, location, and the type of insurance accepted are also important factors in the selection process.

Though patients research physicians on the web, few of them list online reviews a top factor in selecting a primary care physician.

[Here are other key findings from the survey.](#)

Patient satisfaction.

The study found that 75 percent of patients are satisfied with their primary care physicians. Patients find their physicians professional, knowledgeable, and empathetic, all characteristics that patients report as crucial to satisfaction. Patients are comfortable talking about medical issues with their physicians and trust their physicians to hear their concerns.

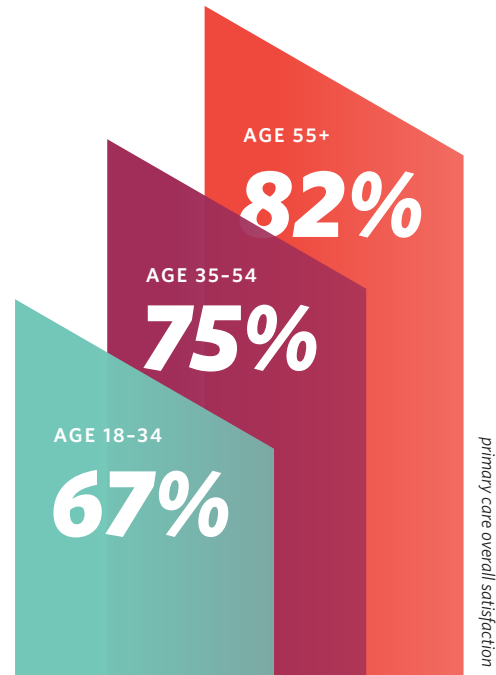


GROWS WITH AGE:

Patient satisfaction increases with age. Older patients are significantly more satisfied with their primary care physicians than patients under 55. In particular, 82 percent of patients over the age of 55 are satisfied with their physicians. Among patients 18 to 34, that rate drops to only two-thirds (67 percent).

LONG WAIT TIMES:

Though patients are generally satisfied with their care, they feel like they spend too much time waiting for it. The survey found that when meeting with a doctor, patients often begin their appointments at their scheduled time. However, once they are taken to the exam room, patients spend nearly a third (29 percent) of their time waiting to be seen by either a nurse or their physician.



Why patients choose a doctor.

The office/practice or healthcare facility is within your insurance network



Out of pocket costs



Convenient location



Capabilities offered within office/practice or healthcare facility



Hospital affiliation



The office/practice or healthcare facility type



The office/practice or healthcare facility's rating on an online review site



0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

● Critical ● Very important

COST AND CONVENIENCE:

Finding an in-network, affordable doctor is the top priority for patients when selecting their physicians and healthcare facilities. When choosing a new doctor, patients consider whether a provider is in-network—51 percent labeled in-network care as critical—while also weighing potential out-of-pocket costs. Only 9 percent of respondents listed good online reviews as one of their top factors in selecting their primary care, showing that cost and savings are of greater importance than online reputation. Apart from financial drivers, patients are also concerned with the location of their chosen physician and facility. According to the survey, 70 percent of respondents said a convenient location, meaning the practice is nearby or easy to get to, was either critical or very important.

AGE AND GENDER:

The survey found that apart from a physician's age (which is closely linked to experience), most patients are not concerned with the demographic profile of their physician. Attributes including race, command of more than one language, and religious affiliation are of little importance. While most patients do not have a preference on their physician's gender, females are significantly more likely than males to prefer their physician be of the same gender. Twenty-three percent of women strongly prefer having a doctor of the same gender, compared to 9 percent of men. This may indicate women feel more comfortable communicating information regarding their health status and conditions to a female physician.

Why patients switch doctors.

Though nearly half of patients stay with their doctor for five years or more (49 percent), often due to comfort and familiarity, patients are sometimes compelled to switch providers.

ATTITUDE MATTERS:

A persuading factor in changing doctors is their level of positivity. A quarter of patients would be likely (“very” or “extremely”) to switch to a new primary care physician were they to find one with a more positive attitude than their current physician. Overwhelmingly, a physician’s physical attractiveness would not be a sufficient reason to switch from their current primary care physician. Eighty percent of respondents said finding a doctor who is more attractive is “not at all likely” a reason for switching to a new primary care physician, indicating that when it comes to care, personality trumps looks.

COMPETENCE BEATS EMPATHY:

Patients also rate a physician’s knowledge and abilities above all other factors (84 percent said competence was “extremely” or “very” influential), followed by accompanying staff competence. Feeling confident in the competence of their care is more important to patients than a doctor’s empathy.

Patient education level.

The survey also sought to determine how educated patients are about their own medical history and conditions, and about their own doctor, when they walk into an appointment with their physician. The findings indicate that, on trend with modern society, many patients spend time online educating themselves and others.

RESEARCHING ONLINE:

When conducting online research about individual physicians, patients most often visit WebMD (55 percent) followed by Google reviews (40 percent). Sites dedicated solely to physician reviews, such as Zocdoc.com are not as popular (3 percent).

ONLINE REVIEWS:

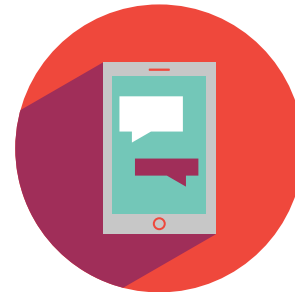
Despite nearly every patient indicating that they read physician reviews online, less than one-fifth (19 percent) of patients have actually taken the time to write a review themselves. Patients

FACILITY QUALITY:

While they agree on the importance of staff competence, female patients are significantly more likely than males to be influenced by the facility quality and accessibility. Though females may not be concerned with the level of attractiveness of their physicians, 78 percent care about the design, cleanliness, and comfort of the facility in which their physician practices.

MORE COMMUNICATION:

More than half of physicians (59 percent) wish they had more time to communicate with patients. Patients, however, are more satisfied with the level of communication with their doctor; only 33 percent indicated wanting more communication time. A minority of both patients and physicians would like more communication via text message (26 and 19 percent, respectively). Physicians are much more likely than patients to see text messaging and other new communication tools as a distraction from the doctor’s core responsibility of patient care (53 percent vs. 34 percent).



anticipate they would only positively review those physicians who go above and beyond expectations. However, those who make patients feel disrespected or uncared for are likely to receive negative reviews.

SECOND OPINIONS:

While patients may visit multiple sites online to educate themselves and research their doctors, almost three-quarters (71 percent) of patients have never sought a second opinion upon receiving a diagnosis from their physician. This finding may indicate that, ultimately, patients trust their doctors.

FAMILY MEDICAL HISTORIES:

Though patients may spend time online researching their physicians, they do not extend as much effort into learning their family medical histories. Most patients know their current medications and allergies, but fewer than half of patients (43 percent) report familiarity with their family medical histories.

The modern patient.

In combining key points of the survey, the study illustrates that patients focus most on insurance, cost, and convenience when selecting a physician and healthcare facility, but appreciate a doctor with experience, adequate competency, and a positive attitude, and care about the general ambience of the facility in which the physician practices. Though patients are sometimes persuaded to leave and are frustrated by long wait times, many are satisfied with their doctors and stay with them for years, looking to them for the final, official opinion on their healthcare decisions.

Patients are leveraging the Internet to research their doctors. Though modern patients use online research, they still rely heavily on the close, human-to-human relationship they've cultivated with their physicians.



Methodology.

In November 2016, Hanover Research designed and administered a survey on behalf of Weatherby Healthcare to investigate the profile of the modern medical patient. In total, this survey collected 488 valid responses after data cleaning. Respondents were over 18 years old, U.S. residents, visited a physician for a standard check-up in the past two years, and visited a medical facility other than a free clinic.

As the leading staffer of locum tenens physicians in the nation, Weatherby Healthcare has the unique position of working with and managing the employment of thousands of doctors in every type of facility in every type of location in the United States. Because the company collaborates with all facets of healthcare, knowing what patients are looking for at the ground level can help it provide essential consultancy and guidance to its thousands of doctors in nearly every state. As healthcare becomes more of a democratized space with new consumers entering its system, being aware of patient attitudes, desires, and knowledge is more important than ever.