

California Physician Survey 2007

Methodology

From April 26-29, 2007, Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., conducted an on-line survey among a representative sample of 300 doctors in California, including California Medical Association member and non-member physicians. The sample was designed to be representative of California's doctors by geography, gender, and age. This survey has a margin of error of ± 5.7 percentage points. Exact question wording and results may be found in the appendix.

Discussion And Conclusions

Overall, physicians in California enjoy practicing medicine and would still choose to become a doctor. But they are frustrated that they don't spend as much time with patients as they would like, even though they are working more hours in their practices than in the past.

Doctors agree that the California health care system is in trouble and needs changes—91% say it is unsustainable. More than half of doctors have considered leaving the state to practice elsewhere.

Among the key findings of the survey:

- Knowing what they know now, 81% of doctors still would choose to become doctors.
- Most (81%) doctors say that helping patients is the most satisfying part of being a doctor.
- More than half of the doctors in California have considered leaving the state.
- 85% of doctors say that the decreased time they are spending with patients affects patient care.

Practicing Medicine In California

California doctors are mainly content with their decision to pursue the medical profession. Knowing what they know now, four in five (81%) still would choose to become a doctor. The most satisfying aspects of being a doctor are helping patients (81%) and the intellectual challenge (50%). Other benefits such as having a respected profession (22%), earning a good living (19%), and being your own boss (12%) do not elicit as strong a response, perhaps because these benefits traditionally associated with being a doctor have been in decline over the years.

However, practicing medicine, especially in California, leaves a lot to be desired. *Ironically, while doctors are working longer hours, they are actually spending less time with their patients than in the past, which many doctors realize negatively affects patient care.* Instead of helping patients, the aspect of practicing medicine they most enjoy, doctors are frustrated by the demands of the business side of medicine. Dealing with administrative issues is the most frequent theme for complaints. Time management issues, such as working long hours and having less time with patients, also are salient. Thinking about the challenges of being a doctor, malpractice rates and the threat of lawsuits (52%) and long hours (46%) rank first and second.

Troubling for the future is that more than half (55%) of doctors have considered leaving California to practice elsewhere. Doctors who have been practicing for 10 or fewer years (61%) are most likely to have considered leaving the state compared with those who have been practicing 11 to 20 years (54%) or longer (44%). Doctors who believe that the health care system in California is in crisis are more likely to have considered leaving (62%) than are those who are less concerned (52%).

Patient Care

The Doctor-Patient Relationship

Doctors agree that the amount of time that they spend with their patients affects patient care and that they are not spending enough time with their patients. Eighty-five percent (85%) of doctors report that spending less time with their patients affects patient care a great deal (45%) or a fair amount (40%). Four in five say that doctors are not able to spend as much time with their patients as they consider necessary to provide good care. Three in four (76%) doctors say that doctors' having less time with patients is a major problem.

While most (81%) doctors report being satisfied with their ability to make decisions about the best treatment for their patients, only 22% are very satisfied (59% are somewhat satisfied). Nineteen percent (19%) are dissatisfied. Not surprisingly, doctors who have considered leaving California (75%) are less satisfied with their ability to make treatment decisions than are doctors who have not considered leaving the state (88%).

Doctors are less satisfied (53% satisfied, 47% dissatisfied) when it comes to getting their patients access to the prescription drugs they need under the new Medicare drug benefit. Most doctors feel that their ability to obtain approvals for exceptions and prior authorizations for their Medicare Part D patients is limited. Doctors also agree that Medicare Part D formularies are getting more rigid (19% much more, 68% somewhat more). They identify mental health (22%), cardiovascular (19%), and smoking cessation (15%) plans as those that offer the least amount of choice for doctors and patients.

Doctors are divided about how the quality of patient care has changed since they started practicing medicine, with nearly the same proportion saying that it has gotten better (42%) as saying that it has gotten worse (38%). Doctors who have been practicing longer are more likely than their less experienced counterparts to say that patient care has improved. Among doctors who have been practicing for more than 20 years, 57% say that patient care has improved, compared with just 32% of those who have been practicing for 10 or fewer years. Men (45%) are more likely than are women (36%) to believe that patient care has improved. Interestingly, little significant difference of opinion exists among doctors who think the health care system in California is in crisis (36% patient care improved) compared with those who think it is in serious trouble, but not in crisis (39%). Among the minority who believe that the health care system is in less dire straits, three in five (62%) say that patient care has improved.

Physicians and Technology

Doctors—especially those who have been practicing longer—credit technology-driven factors with improving patient care. Younger doctors are less likely to mention technology-driven factors, which is probably a function of technology being more prevalent among the younger generation. Among doctors who say that the quality of patient care has improved, one in four (24%) says that advances in medicine and medical technology have contributed, and another quarter (24%) say that pharmacological advances and better drugs have. Doctors who have been practicing for more than 20 years are more likely to say that pharmacological advances (42%) and improved medical technology (33%) are responsible for improved patient care than are their colleagues who have been in practice for fewer than 20 years (18% and 21%, respectively).

California's Troubled Health Care System

Doctors agree that the health care system in California is in trouble and needs changes—91% say that it is unsustainable. About four in five doctors think that the California health care system is in crisis (35%) or in serious trouble (45%). Doctors who have been in practice for more than 20 years (40%) are more likely to say the system is in crisis than are doctors who have been practicing fewer than 20 years (33%). Doctors who have considered leaving California to practice elsewhere (39%) are more concerned than are doctors who have not considered leaving (29%).

Appendix

All responses are percentages.

- Q.1 Knowing what you know now about the medical profession, if you could make the choice over again, would you still choose to become a doctor?

Yes, would still choose to be a doctor	81
No, would not choose to be a doctor	19

- Q.2 Thinking about the benefits of being a doctor, which one or two of the following do you find the most rewarding or satisfying aspects of being a doctor?

THIS TABLE HAS BEEN RANKED BY THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGE

Helping patients	81
Intellectual challenge	50
Having a respected profession.....	22
Earning a good living.....	19
Being your own boss.....	12
Other	1
Not sure.....	15

- Q.3 Thinking about the challenges of being a doctor, which one or two of the following do you think are the most challenging aspects of being a doctor?

THIS TABLE HAS BEEN RANKED BY THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGE

Malpractice rates and the threat of lawsuits....	52
Long hours.....	46
HMOs	26
Patient care.....	19
Medi-Cal.....	12
Medicare	10
CME and other requirements.....	2
Other.....	12

Q.4 Listed here are some concerns that doctors have raised about practicing medicine these days. For each one, please indicate whether it is a major problem, a minor problem, or not a problem.

	<u>A Major Problem</u>	<u>A Minor Problem</u>	<u>Not A Problem</u>
The limits and restrictions that insurance companies and HMOs place on doctors	76	19	5
Doctors have less time with patients	76	21	3
The threat of malpractice lawsuits	63	32	5
Doctors are experiencing a deteriorating quality of life....	62	33	5
Doctors have more administrative responsibilities.....	48	45	7

Q.5 Have you considered leaving California to practice medicine elsewhere?

Yes, have considered leaving California	55
No, have not considered leaving California.....	45

Q.6 Overall, how has the quality of patient care changed since you first started practicing medicine-- has it improved a great deal, improved just some, stayed about the same, gotten a little worse, or gotten much worse?

Improved a great deal.....	15
Improved just some	27
Stayed about the same.....	20
Gotten a little worse.....	27
Gotten much worse	11
Not sure	-

(ASKED ONLY OF DOCTORS WHO SAY THE QUALITY OF PATIENT CARE HAS IMPROVED.)

Q.7 How has the quality of patient care improved? What factors have contributed the most to improved patient care?

Improved technology, advances in medicine, medical technology	24
Pharmacological advances, better drugs	24
Electronic record keeping, computerized records, easier to track down data, medical records	15
Better diagnostics, improved diagnostics tools	13
Informed, aware, educated patients, more understanding of disease, illnesses	10

Q.8 Many doctors report that they are spending less time with their patients than they did when they first started practicing medicine. In your opinion, how much does this affect patient care--a great deal, a fair amount, just some, or not much at all?

A great deal	45
A fair amount	40
Just some	11
Not much at all.....	4

Q.9 In general, are doctors able to spend as much time with their patients as you consider necessary to provide good care?

Yes 20
 No 80

Q.10 How satisfied are you with your ability to make decisions about the best treatment for your patients--very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied?

Very satisfied 22
 Somewhat satisfied 59
 Somewhat dissatisfied 15
 Very dissatisfied 4

Q.11 And how satisfied are you with your ability to get your patients access to the prescription drugs they need under the new Medicare drug benefit?

Very satisfied 5
 Somewhat satisfied 48
 Somewhat dissatisfied 35
 Very dissatisfied 12

Q.12 Thinking about Medicare Part D prescription drug plans, would you say that the formularies are getting much more rigid, somewhat more rigid, somewhat less rigid, or much less rigid?

Much more rigid 19
 Somewhat more rigid 68
 Somewhat less rigid 13
 Much less rigid -

Q.13 Which of the following Medicare Part D prescription drug plans offers the least amount of choice for you and your patients?

THIS TABLE HAS BEEN RANKED BY THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGE

Mental Health 22
 Cardio-Vascular 19
 Smoking Cessation 15
 Diabetes 7
 Pain 6
 Other 6
 None 25

Q.14 Please rate your ability to obtain approvals for exceptions and prior authorizations for your Medicare Part D patients on a scale from one to 10. On this scale, a "1" means that your ability to obtain approvals is extremely limited and a "10" means that your ability to obtain approvals is not limited at all. You may use any number from one to 10.

7-10, not limited at all 21
 4-6 43
 1-3, extremely limited 22
 Do not see Medicare Part D patients 14
 Mean 5.0

Q.15 Which one of the following do you think is the biggest impediment for people to get timely access to health care?

THIS TABLE HAS BEEN RANKED BY THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGE

Lack of health insurance	66
Too few physicians.....	16
Inability to pay co-pays and deductibles	8
Other	10

Q.16 In general, how different is the quality of care that uninsured persons receive compared with the care that people with insurance receive--much lower quality, somewhat lower quality, the same quality, or higher quality?

Much lower quality	41
Somewhat lower quality	42
The same quality	16
Higher quality	1

Q.17 Thinking about the health care system as a whole, which of the following do you think best describes the state of the health care system in California today--it is in crisis, it is in serious trouble but not in crisis, it is in some trouble, or it is not really in trouble at all?

It is in crisis	35
It is in serious trouble but not in crisis.....	45
It is in some trouble.....	19
It is not really in trouble at all	1

Q.18 Is the current health care system in California sustainable or do changes need to be made?

Current system is sustainable	9
Changes need to be made	91
Not sure	-