



Facts About the ABMS Consumer Survey: Lifelong Learning and Other Qualities in Choosing a Doctor

The American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) commissioned a consumer survey that was conducted in December 2010 by Opinion Research Corporation, Princeton, N.J. More than 1,000 U.S. adults were randomly selected to participate in a telephone survey that focused on knowledge of doctors' qualifications and factors considered important in choosing a doctor, including Board Certification and participation in a Maintenance of Certification program.

Key Findings

The ABMS MOC® Program

Importance of Lifelong Learning

When consumers were asked about their doctor's participation in a Maintenance of Certification program (defined by the surveyor as "a process by which doctors who are Board Certified continue to participate in a continuous process of lifelong learning and self-assessment in their specialties"):

- 95 percent say it is 'important,' with two-thirds (66 percent) saying it is 'very important'
- 84 percent would do one or more of the following if they found out their physician does not participate in the MOC program:
 - 59 percent would ask their doctor why he or she chooses not to participate
 - 56 percent would try to learn more about the MOC program
 - 45 percent would look for a new doctor
 - 41 percent would stop referring the doctor to family and friends

When told that some doctors who were certified before 1990 are not required to participate in the MOC program, more than three-fourths (78 percent) say they would be bothered if their doctor chose not to maintain certification and women were significantly more likely to be bothered (83 percent) than men (72 percent).

Assessing Doctor's Qualifications

When asked about the importance of six factors that are part of the MOC program, 90 percent say all the factors are important. The factors – and the percentage of people who rate them as "very important" include:

- testing at regular intervals to assess the doctor's medical knowledge (60 percent)
- providing quality of care information to patients/the public (54 percent)
- periodically assessing the doctor's clinical performance and quality of care to see how he or she compares with others who offer the same types of services (51 percent)
- participating in self-assessment activities to determine how the doctor is doing (51 percent)
- conducting surveys among doctors, nurses and other health care professionals who work with the doctor (48 percent)
- surveys of patients to assess the doctor's communication skills (47 percent)



- The importance of doctors participating in self-assessment activities is higher among younger Americans (60 percent of those 18-34 vs. 44 percent of those ages 55+)
- Importance of patient surveys is more important to women than men (51 percent vs. 43 percent)

Important Factors in Choosing a Doctor

- The top six factors in choosing a doctor – selected by the majority of survey respondents as very or somewhat important – are:
 1. Bedside manner or communications skills (95 percent)
 2. Board Certification (91 percent)
 3. Recommendation from a friend or family member (83 percent)
 4. Location of the office (80 percent)
 5. Hospital affiliation (76 percent)
 6. The school or hospital where the doctor trained (62 percent)
- Women are more likely than men to find these factors important: bedside manner or communication skills (96 percent vs. 93 percent); Board Certification (96 percent vs. 86 percent); location of office (86 percent vs. 73 percent); hospital affiliation (82 percent vs. 69 percent); school or hospital where doctor trained (66 percent vs. 57 percent).

Knowledge of Board Certification

- 78 percent incorrectly believe that a doctor must be Board Certified in his or her specialty area to practice medicine. In fact, a doctor only needs a license after graduating from medical school to practice in the US
- 66 percent know that being Board Certified is not the same thing as being licensed. Board Certification requirements include training in a particular specialty, periodic assessment and examination
- Although, when Board Certification is defined, 91 percent think it is important, only 23 percent gave a correct definition when asked to define Board Certification unaided
- 56 percent (66 percent of women vs. 46 percent of men) know whether their current doctor is Board Certified. Younger Americans ages 18-34 are least likely to know this fact about their doctor (43 percent)
- 79 percent of Americans would do one or more of the following if they learned that their doctor was not Board Certified:
 - 56 percent would try to learn more about the value of Board Certification
 - 54 percent would ask their doctor why he or she chooses not to be Board Certified
 - 39 percent would look for a new doctor
 - 34 percent would stop recommending that doctor to friends and family (38 percent for women vs. 30 percent for men)

Checking Out a Specialist

- When their primary care physicians refer them to a specialist:
 - 42 percent would take that doctor's advice and make an appointment without asking questions



- 31 percent would take the name and then research the doctor before making an appointment
- 26 percent would ask questions about the doctor’s qualifications, such as training, experience and Board Certification
- Women are more likely than men (37 percent vs. 26 percent) to take the name and research the doctor before making an appointment. Those over age 65 are least likely to do so (21 percent vs. 34 percent of those 18-64)
- When asked in an unaided question what kind of information consumers want to know about their doctor:
 - 32 percent mentioned something related to the doctor’s experience, such as years in practice and expertise in their specialty
 - 29 percent mentioned the doctor’s training and/or credentials, including the school they attended, their qualifications, the type and amount of training and conducting education or training
 - 26 percent would like to know about the doctor’s performance, including rate of success or failure, malpractice lawsuits, history or background, complaints against them and their skill.
 - 20 percent mentioned personal qualities, such as bedside manner, communication skills, knowledge, being caring and compassionate and honesty
 - 20 percent would like to know about recommendations and reputation of the doctor
 - 10 percent gave other responses

Researching a Doctor Online

- 41 percent have researched a doctor online
 - 67 percent of those who have researched a doctor online have used the websites of hospitals or clinics
 - 66 percent used websites of their doctor’s offices
 - 55 percent have used websites of medical associations and medical boards
 - 34 percent used websites where patients can rate doctors anonymously
 - 14 percent have used social networking sites
- People ages 18-64 (45 percent) are more likely to research a doctor online than those age 65 or older (21 percent)
- Women are more likely than men to research a doctor online (49 percent women vs. 32 men)

Methodology

The 2010 survey was conducted December 3-6 among a representative sample of 1,006 adults in the continental United States. Results were weighted by age, sex, race and region to ensure a representative sample. The margin of error for results based on the total survey is plus or minus four percentage points.