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## Examining the Epocrates survey of PCP trends and attitudes

By Debra Beaulieu

### Editor's Corner:

A new nationwide survey of 1,060 primary-care physicians conducted by Epocrates market research explores a broad variety of physician topics such as job satisfaction, patient safety tools and healthcare reform--many of which we've discussed in previous issues of *FiercePracticeManagement* and sister publications.

Some of the survey highlights include:

- Of all specialty groups surveyed, primary-care physicians were the least satisfied with their career choice, with 70 percent reporting that they would still choose a career in primary care today knowing what they do now. However, this is a dramatic increase from past years--up from 28 percent in 2007 and 60 percent in 2009.
- 66 percent of respondents report avoiding errors weekly with Epocrates. However, "coverage issues/price" ranked as the top reason for Epocrates users to change prescription decisions.
- More than 60 percent of primary-care physicians are glad when patients come in with information they have printed from the Internet and believe it helps them communicate with their patients, but only 4 percent completely agreed that the information is generally appropriate for the patients' medical condition.
- 55 percent of primary-care physicians spend an average of 15 minutes or less with their patients during their visits; 45 percent said they saved more than 20 minutes daily using Epocrates.
- When asked to grade the recent healthcare reform bill, 2 percent of primary-care physicians gave it an "A"; 43 percent gave the bill unsatisfactory marks.

After reviewing the results, available in their entirety here, I had the opportunity to discuss some of these findings and trends with Dr. Dan Diamond, a family physician in private practice in Silverdale, Wash., who also serves as Clinical Assistant Professor for the University of Washington School of Medicine.

Any time I speak with a source about a survey, my first question is whether any of the results were surprising. According to Dr. Diamond, Epocrates data that physician satisfaction has increased, rather than decreased, significantly since 2007 (slide 3) doesn't seem to jibe with what he's learned in researching and delivering keynote speeches on the topic of physician burnout.

His guess is that the sample of physicians, all users of Epocrates decision-support tools, may be younger and have come to medicine with a different set of expectations than those who've been in medicine long enough to experience more of the changes.

Another curious point I brought up was the seemingly high use of handheld technology to find price information for prescription drugs--and using that data to make medication choices--a sharp diversion from physicians' historic lack of knowledge of or willingness to discuss health costs with patients. Part of this trend also may be attributed to newer physicians' increased awareness of how cost issues play into patient care. And according to Diamond, before Epocrates, he had no way of knowing a medication's cost

other than the information received from pharmaceutical reps, which didn't take into account patients' particular coverage. Now, he can quickly and easily determine a drug's tier or formulary, as well as the cash price for the medication.

Finally, I asked for Diamond's take on such a tech-savvy group of physicians being relatively unsupportive of patients bringing in medical information they printed from the Internet (slide 8). Although 60 percent of the respondents said they were happy when patients brought in such information, only 5 percent completely agreed that the information patients brought in was useful, while 4 percent thought it was generally appropriate for a patient's condition.

The problem, he says, is that a patient's symptoms that may be similar to his or her neighbor's may lead them down an entirely wrong path on the information superhighway. He gives the example that the common pregnancy symptoms of fatigue, nausea and lack of a period could completely fit his symptoms as a male.

To better equip patients to make the most of online resources, Diamond says he works hard to make sure patients begin their research with an accurate diagnosis vs. one they pieced together themselves through Google searches. "I then steer them to sites I think are going to give them reliable information," he says.

Whether or not you're a PCP or even an Epocrates user, the survey is worth a look. Do the results jibe with your experience? Check it out and let us know what you think.