



**BlueCross BlueShield
Association**

An Association of Independent
Blue Cross and Blue Shield Plans



Consumer Preferences and Usage of Healthcare Information

Summary Report

November 2006

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Summary of Findings

- **Consumers want information to support their healthcare decision-making**
 - › Eighty-eight percent of consumers say they would search for information on treatment options if they were diagnosed with a medical condition
 - › Four out of five consumers (81%) believe that, if needed, they would search for information on their own about physicians or hospitals
 - › Nearly two-thirds of consumers surveyed (64%) feel it is important to obtain health information from sources in addition to their doctor
 - › Two-thirds of consumers who have made various healthcare decisions in the past year, e.g. selecting a PCP, a specialist, a hospital or a treatment option, have sought out information to make that decision
- **Consumers place a high priority on network, logistical and quality information**
 - › The majority of consumers who selected a PCP, specialist or hospital in the past year used provider network affiliation and logistical information (e.g., whether provider is in their insurer's network, affiliation with specific hospital, office location and hours)
 - › Availability is one key reason for the high rate of usage of this information, since over 80 percent of consumers who looked for this information were able to find it
- **A large unmet need exists among consumers for quality information (e.g., patient satisfaction, clinical indicators, third-party evaluations), especially on physicians**
 - › Almost half of all consumers (52% for PCP, 42% for specialist) that searched for information on physicians reported that they wanted but could not find quality information
 - › Biggest gaps include patient satisfaction ratings on attentiveness of doctor and quality of care, third party evaluations such as certification by insurer as a top performer, and clinical indicators such as complication or mortality rates
 - › Gaps in quality information sought by consumers are slightly smaller for hospital and treatment selection
- **While more than half of all consumers are seeking cost information when selecting a provider, consumers rank several other types of information as being more important than cost when selecting a PCP, specialist, hospital or treatment option**
 - › Consumers ranked other types of information related to network, quality, logistical, or patient satisfaction on facilities more important than specific cost elements when selecting a PCP, specialist, hospital or clinic
- **It is critical to ensure that quality of care data is presented alongside cost data**
 - › In the absence of clinical quality data, consumers mistakenly correlate cost of care with quality of care

Research assesses a wide range of information about consumer preferences and usage of health information

A national online survey was conducted of roughly 1,647 health insurance members over the age of 18 from the Knowledge Networks Consumer Panel.

The survey asked consumers about the information they used/would use to support the following healthcare decisions:

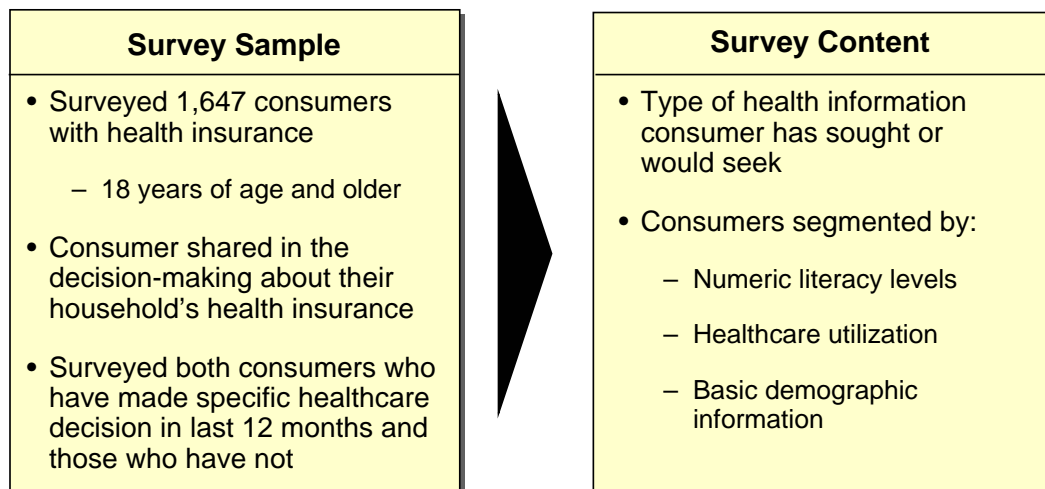
1. Selecting a PCP
2. Selecting a specialist
3. Selecting a hospital or clinic
4. Selecting a treatment option

Consumers were asked about the types of information they have searched and used based on whether they have made any of these healthcare decisions over the past year. Those who did not have experience in any of these areas were asked to predict what their information preference would be if they ever had to make these types of decisions.

Finally, consumers were asked questions about their healthcare utilization and health care attitudes so meaningful differences could be established between different types of consumers.

(See Appendix for survey details and types of information consumers evaluated in decision-making contexts.)

Survey Methodology



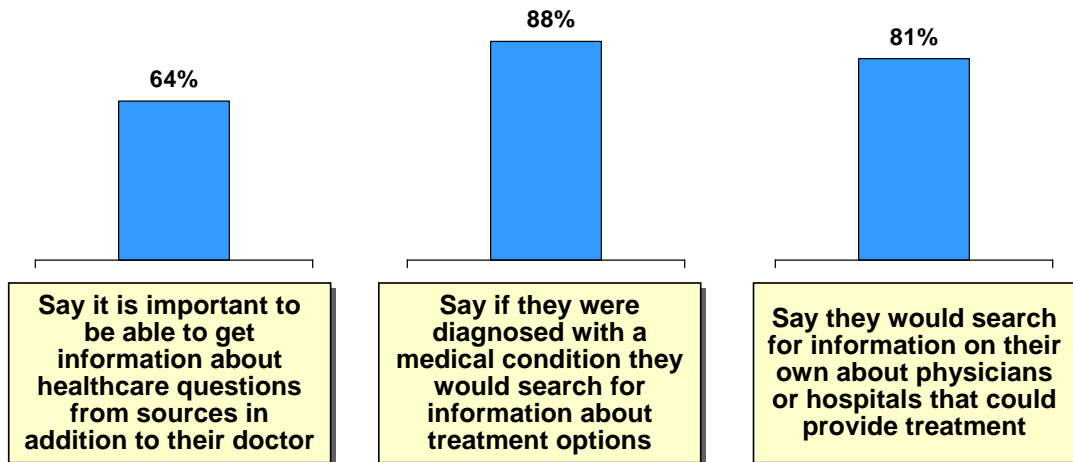
Consumers want to access and use healthcare information, including sources in addition to their doctors

More than four out of five adult consumers expressed some interest in obtaining information on treatment options and providers.

Moreover, nearly two-thirds of all consumers said it is important to obtain health information from sources in addition to their doctors.

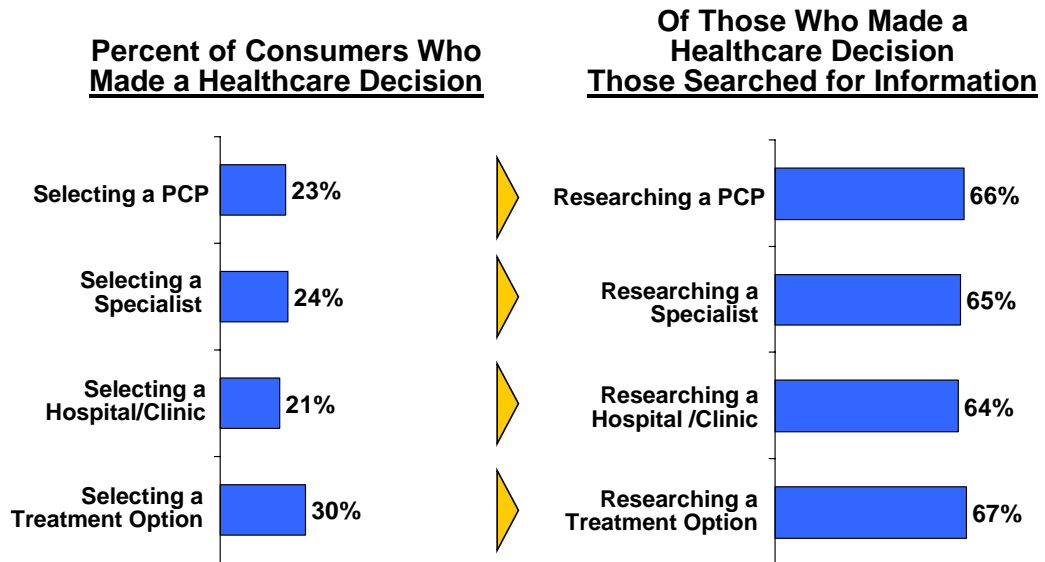
Making Healthcare Decisions

Voice of Consumers



Most consumers that need information have searched for it
Less than a third of all consumers made a provider or treatment decision in the past 12 months. However, for each type of decision that was made, roughly two-thirds sought out health information to make that decision.

Making Healthcare Decisions



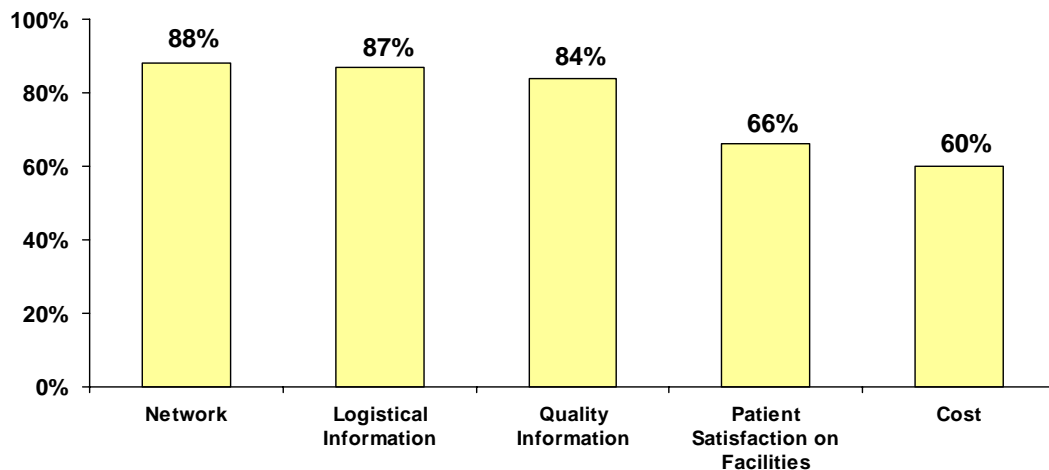
Consumers prioritize network, logistical, and quality information over cost information on PCPs

Among consumers who have searched for information about PCPs in the past year, network information (i.e., whether PCP is in their insurer's network or affiliated with a particular hospital or medical group) and logistical information (i.e., office hours and location of PCP offices) were the most used. The availability of information appears to encourage its use, since network and logistical information is readily available on most insurers' Web sites.

Many information searchers also obtained quality information about PCPs, particularly focused on state board certification, the PCP's medical education, or patient satisfaction ratings on the quality of care received.

Selecting a PCP

Of Consumers Who Selected a PCP, Percent of Consumers Who Searched and Used Information by Type in Past 12 Months



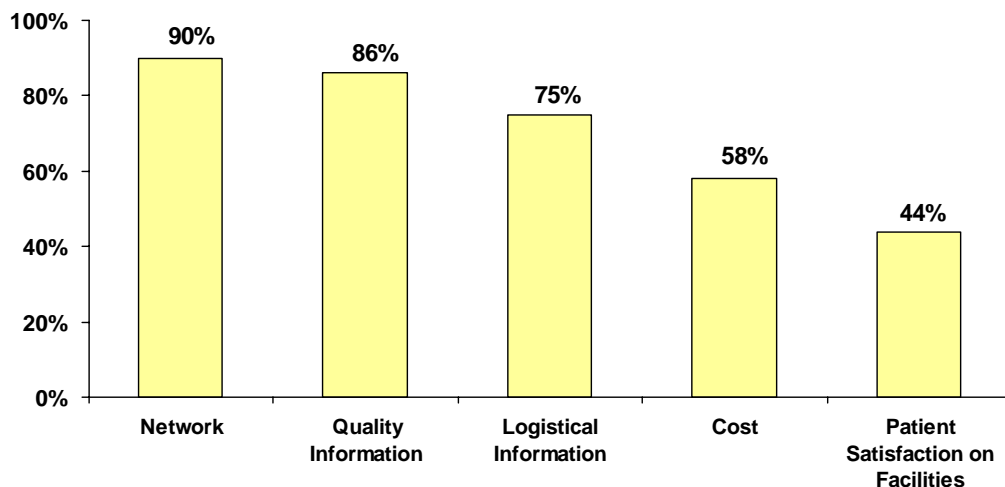
Similar to PCP selection, consumers prioritize network and quality information when selecting a specialist, but logistical information is less important

Among those who searched for specialist information in the past year, network and quality information were most used. Similar to the types of information sought by consumers in PCP selection, network data for specialists is also focused on whether a doctor is part of a health insurance network or affiliated with a particular hospital or medical group. Also, quality information continues to be focused on state board certification, medical education, and patient satisfaction ratings of care received.

Although logistical information is less important in specialist selection than PCP selection, the most important element remains office hours and location.

Selecting a Specialist

Of Consumers Who Selected a Specialist, Percent of Consumers Who Searched and Used Information by Type in Past 12 Months

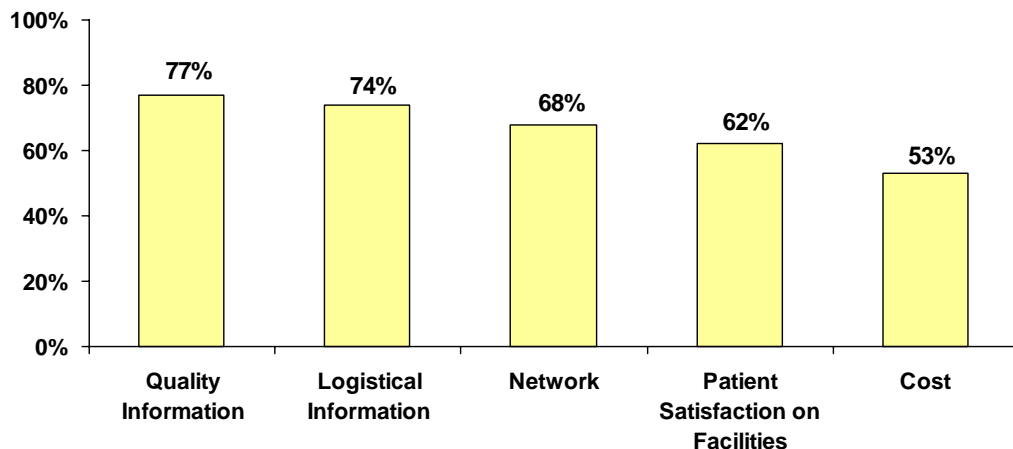


Quality information ranks highest in importance for hospital or clinic selection

Among those who searched for information about hospitals or clinics in the past year, quality information was most utilized. Some of the more commonly used information includes patient satisfaction on quality of care received, patient satisfaction on care coordination across medical team, average length of stay, and hospital complication rates. Logistical information (i.e., hospital location) and network information (i.e., whether doctor is affiliated with hospital) were also highly utilized by consumers. However, logistical and network information play a more important role for PCP and specialist selection than they do for hospital or clinic selection.

Selecting a Hospital or Clinic

Of Consumers Who Selected a Hospital or Clinic, Percent of Consumers Who Searched and Used Information by Type in Past 12 Months



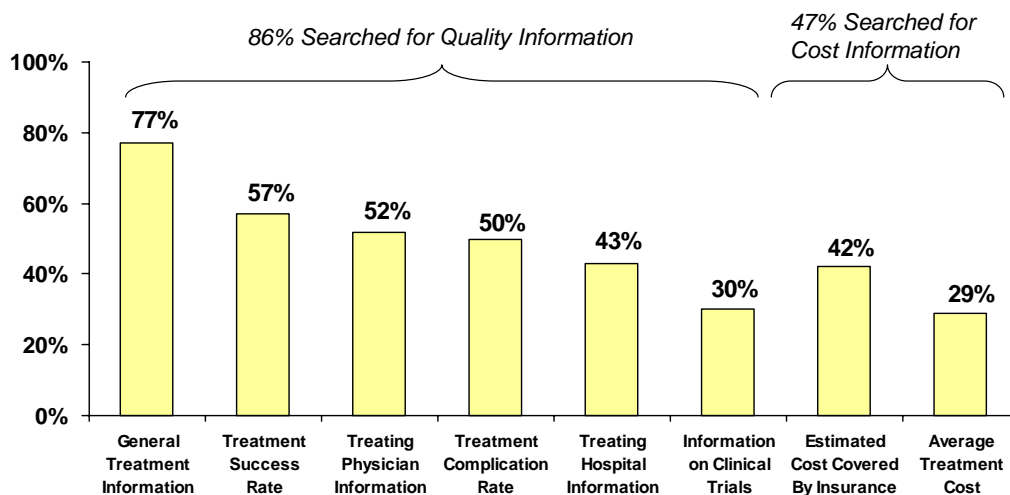
Treatment selection focused on several types of quality information, particularly general information about treatment option or success rates

Almost all consumers (86%) seek at least one type of quality information when making a decision about treatment selection.

Primary type of information sought by consumers making treatment selection decisions is general knowledge of each treatment option. Consumers also seek data on complication and success rates of various alternatives, as well as information about the provider administering the treatment.

Selecting a Treatment Option

Of Consumers Who Selected a Treatment Option, Percent of Consumers Who Searched and Used Information by Type in Past 12 Months



Information on quality, such as clinical indicators, patient satisfaction ratings, or evaluative information are biggest missed opportunities in supporting provider selection

At least one-third to one-half of consumers who searched for quality indicators on providers had difficulty finding this information. Patient satisfaction ratings, such as attentiveness of doctor, ability to explain treatment procedures, quality of care received, and care coordination of medical team, were often sought by consumers.

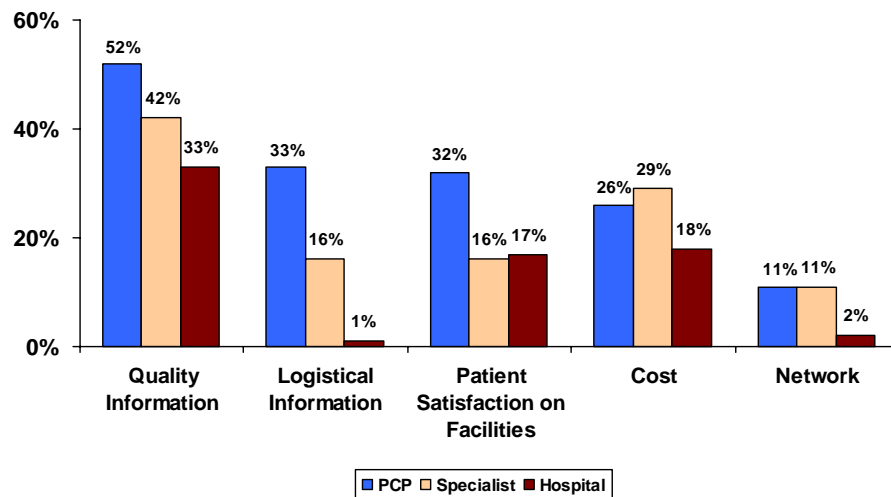
Clinical quality indicators were also identified as information that consumers would find useful but were unable to locate, such as the percent of patients that received proper preventive care screenings and medications, complication rates, mortality rates, and comparisons to other providers.

Consumers also searched for, but were unable to find, information on third party evaluations, such as whether their PCP was certified by their insurer or a medical organization as a “top performer.”

When comparing results for gaps in hospital information versus PCP or specialist information, the percent of consumers failing to find quality, logistical, cost, or network information on hospitals is consistently lower. This suggests that consumers find all types of hospital or clinic information more readily available than PCP or specialist information.

Selecting a Provider

Of Consumers Who Selected a Provider, Percent of Consumers Who Searched—But Did Not Find—Information in Past 12 Months



Although some consumers mistakenly equate high cost with high quality, information on quality presented alongside cost data enables many consumers to make better provider decisions

In a recent consumer health literacy study, it appears some consumers mistakenly equate high cost with high quality, as indicated by their choice of hospital based on cost and patient-to-nurse ratio. Twenty-six percent of consumers selected a more expensive hospital even though there were less expensive options with the same or lower patient-to-nurse ratios (a lower patient-to-nurse ratio indicates better quality).

Another 8% chose the lowest price hospital, but chose one with a higher patient-to-nurse ratio when lower ratio (better) alternatives were available. This may indicate consumers misunderstood the patient-to-nurse ratio, and assumed that a higher ratio was better.

However, about two-thirds of consumers made more rational tradeoffs between hospital cost and quality based on nursing ratios. Forty-two percent of consumers made their hospital selection by focusing on those with the lowest patient-to-nurse ratio and then choosing the best priced hospital associated with that ratio. Another 24% used lowest price as their primary criteria in choosing a hospital and then choose the hospital that also had the best patient-to-nurse ratio.

This study indicates that the way cost and quality information is presented to consumers is critical for supporting effective decision-making. Additionally, a risk exists that consumers are using cost as a proxy for quality.

Quality and Cost Information

Percent of Consumers Choosing Hospitals By Cost and Patient-to-Nurse Ratio

| Percent of Consumers | Hospital Cost | Patient-to-Nurse Ratio (Lower Ratio is Better) | |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|--|---|
| 26% | Higher price* | Higher ratio | May have equated higher cost with higher quality |
| 8% | Lowest price* | Higher ratio | |
| 42% | Best price among quality cohorts | Lowest ratio* | Made rational trade-off between price and quality |
| 24% | Lowest price* | Best ratio among cost cohorts | |

*Priority factor used for decision-making
 Source: University of Oregon Health Literacy Study, 2005

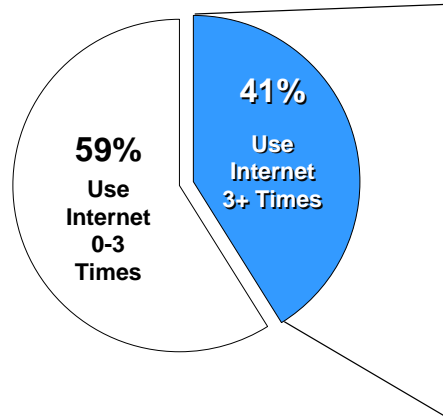
Internet usage for health information is significantly greater among women and higher healthcare users

Almost half of all consumers have used the Internet three or more times to obtain health information in the past year.

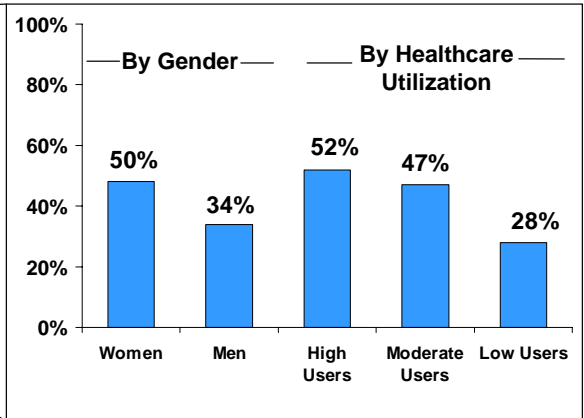
Significant differences in Internet use exist by consumer type. Women, for instance, were far more likely to use the Internet than were men to search for health information (50% to 34%). Also, high and moderate users of healthcare were more likely to use the Internet to search for healthcare information than light users.

Use of Internet for Health Information

Amount of Internet Use in Past 12 Months – All Consumers



Percent Using Internet 3+ Times by Consumer Segment



Appendix A: Survey Methodology

Key Survey Facts

Sample – A representative selection of 1,647 consumers 18+ years of age who have health insurance, including both Blue members and non-Blue members.

Sample Frame – The sample frame were participants of the national Knowledge Networks Internet Panel. Unlike other Internet Panels, members are recruited using probability sampling techniques to limit self-selection bias.

Sample Weighting – The sample was adjusted slightly through post-survey weighting to ensure a demographic profile consistent with U.S. Census data.

Survey Time – February 2006.

Survey Method – Internet-based.

Survey Length – The survey took between 15 and 18 minutes for respondents to complete.

Survey Structure – The survey covered a wide variety of health information. To limit survey length, respondents were asked about no more than two of the following four types of information:

1. Information on PCPs
2. Information on Specialists
3. Information on Hospitals/Clinics
4. Information on Treatment Options

Selection was based first on past respondent experience in searching for information in any of the above areas. Those with no experiences—and those with experience in more than two areas—were randomly assigned to two of the four categories.

Question Design – Questions were presented to respondents using a “check all the apply” lists. This allowed the survey to cover a vast array of information items while limiting survey length. Information rankings were structured so that respondents first picked their favorite item from a defined list, that item was removed, and then respondents were asked to pick their next favorite item.

Demographic Information – Most demographic information about respondents comes from the Knowledge Network database on panel participants.

Appendix B: Types of Information Consumers Evaluated about PCPs

| | |
|---|--|
| Network information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether doctor is part of network in my insurance plan (so that my insurance would cover more of the charges) • Hospitals or medical group with which the doctor is affiliated |
| Logistical information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doctor's office hours and location • Average waiting time for to see a doctor as reported by patients |
| Quality information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether doctor has been certified by state medical board • Doctor's medical education • Whether doctor has been certified by insurer as "top performer" • Whether doctor has been certified by medical organization such as American Medical Association as "top performer" • Patient satisfaction on attentiveness of doctor • Patient satisfaction on quality of care received • Percent of patients that received care for particular conditions as prescribed by clinical experts • Percent of patients that received proper preventative care screenings and medications |
| Cost information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estimated out-of-pocket cost for desired treatment that patient could expect to pay • Estimated total cost for desired treatment • Estimated total cost for desired treatment compared to similar specialists |
| Patient satisfaction on facility | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patient satisfaction on the friendliness of the office staff • Patient satisfaction ratings on quality of doctor's office waiting room, facilities, and parking |

Appendix C: Types of Information Consumers Evaluated about Specialists

| | |
|---|--|
| Network information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether doctor is part of network in my insurance plan (so that my insurance would cover more of the charges) • Hospitals or medical group with which the doctor is affiliated |
| Logistical information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doctor’s office hours and location • Average waiting time for scheduling an appointment with doctor as reported by patients |
| Quality information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether doctor has been certified by state medical board • Doctor’s medical education • Whether doctor has been certified by insurer as “top performer” • Whether doctor has been certified by medical organization such as American Medical Association as “top performer” • Patient satisfaction on attentiveness of doctor and his / her ability to explain treatment procedures • Patient satisfaction on quality of care received • Patient satisfaction ratings on ability of doctor to coordinate entire team of physicians, nurses, and technicians involved in treatment • Percent of patients that received care for particular conditions as prescribed by clinical experts • Doctor’s complication rate for treatment being considered • Comparison of doctor’s complication rate for treatment being considered to those found among other doctors in that specialty |
| Cost information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estimated out-of-pocket cost for desired treatment that patient could expect to pay • Estimated total cost for desired treatment • Estimated total cost for desired treatment compared to similar specialists |
| Patient satisfaction on facility | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patient satisfaction ratings on quality of doctor’s office waiting room, facilities, and parking |

Appendix D: Types of Information Consumers Evaluated about Hospitals and Clinics

| | |
|---|--|
| Network information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether PCP or specialist if affiliated with hospital |
| Logistical information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospital's location |
| Quality information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether hospital has been certified by state or an independent accrediting agency, such as JCAHO • Whether hospital has been certified by insurer as "top performer" • Whether hospital is affiliated with a university or religious organization • Ranking of hospital in a prominent news journal, such as US News and World Report • Patient satisfaction on quality of care received • Patient satisfaction care coordination of the entire team of physicians, nurses, and technicians involved in treatment • Hospital complication rates for treatment / surgery being received • Hospital mortality rates for treatment / surgery being received • Hospital complication/ mortality rates compared to those of similar hospitals • Average length of stay for patient undergoing treatment / surgery being received • Percent of patients that received care for particular conditions as prescribed by clinical experts |
| Cost information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estimated out-of-pocket cost for desired treatment or procedure • Estimated total cost for desired treatment or procedure • Estimated total cost for desired treatment or procedure compared to similar hospitals |
| Patient satisfaction on facility | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patient satisfaction ratings on attentiveness and courtesy of hospital staff • Patient satisfaction on quality of room, facilities, and parking |