

Older Americans' Views on Naturopathic Physicians in Medicare

Prepared by:

infosurv
Innovation in Online Research

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INTRODUCTION

The Affordable Care Act, sometimes referred to as “Obamacare,” prohibits commercial insurers from discriminating against licensed health care providers with respect to participation in insurance. The law, however, does not apply to the federal Medicare program. Currently, the Medicare program does not include licensed naturopathic physicians among the health care providers who are eligible to participate.

The American Association of Naturopathic Physicians (AANP) sought to assess the interest of Medicare beneficiaries in having access to naturopathic physicians. AANP contracted with Infosurv to determine the extent to which Medicare beneficiaries would seek care from naturopathic physicians if naturopathic physicians were included in Medicare.

METHODOLOGY

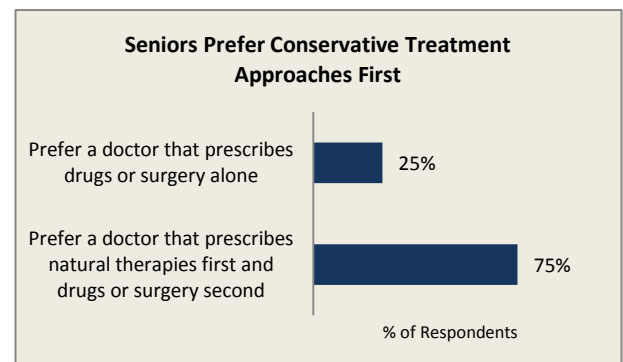
Infosurv conducted an online survey of 384 individuals. The sample consisted of persons 65 years of age and older who live in states that license naturopathic physicians. The survey provides an error range of +/- 5% at the 95% confidence level for the total sample. Respondents were randomly identified from a bona fide online survey sampling panel. The survey was administered blindly, without any identification of AANP as the survey’s sponsor.

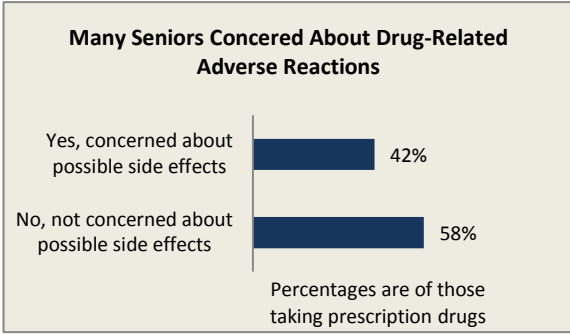
Infosurv takes great care in protecting the confidentiality of online survey respondents, adhering to the strict survey standards of the Council of American Survey Research Associations (<http://www.casro.org/?page=TheCASROCode>). Using a unique Personal Access Code (PAC) system, Infosurv can virtually guarantee against duplicate or unauthorized responses, while maintaining 100% respondent anonymity. Infosurv assigns a PAC to each online respondent, and the PAC is embedded in the survey link e-mailed to the respondent.

RESULTS

Older Americans Prefer Natural Therapies over Drugs or Surgery

Three-quarters of Medicare beneficiaries prefer that their doctor use natural therapies, such as improved diet or supplements, before prescribing drugs or surgery. This finding is not surprising given the number of older Americans who take one or more prescription drugs and who worry about the side effects of those drugs. The survey found that 88% of seniors are currently taking prescription drugs, and more than four in ten seniors who take prescription drugs worry about side effects.



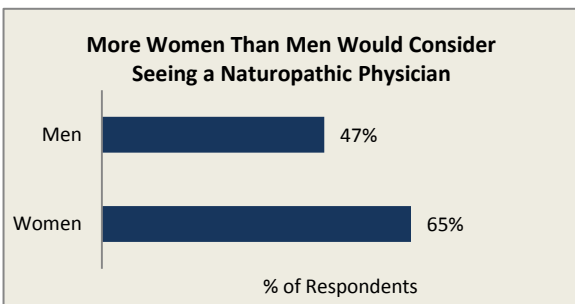
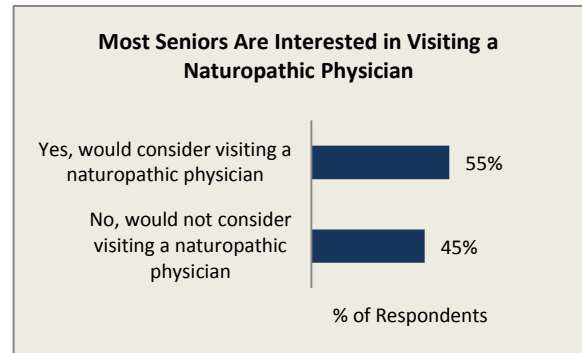


Seniors' concerns about prescription drugs are well-founded. According to the prominent medical web site WebMD, "all drugs come with side effects. Many are minor, some are just an inconvenience, a few are serious, and some are just plain strange."ⁱ Adverse drug reactions are among the leading causes of death in the United States, accounting for more than 100,000 deaths each year. In addition, they result in more than 2 million hospitalizations and serious injuries.ⁱⁱ Of concern to

Medicare beneficiaries is that adverse drug reactions become more common as patients get older. The problem is exacerbated when patients are prescribed multiple drugs, which raises the likelihood of harmful drug interactions.

Most Seniors Would Consider Seeing a Naturopathic Physician

Given the desire of older Americans to treat health problems with natural therapies first before advancing to more aggressive treatment options, it is not surprising that a majority of seniors (55%) would consider seeing a naturopathic doctor for their health care needs. Naturopathic physicians emphasize non-invasive, natural therapies. They resort to prescribing drugs only when absolutely necessary or to referring patients to other health care professionals when surgery may be advisable.



Access to naturopathic physicians is an important women's health issue. More women (65%) than men (47%) would consider visiting a naturopathic physician. Many naturopathic physicians specialize in women's health, and a large majority of naturopathic physicians are women.

Lack of Medicare Coverage Is a Barrier to Accessing Naturopathic Care

Federal law does not currently include naturopathic physicians among those health professionals who can participate in Medicare. As a result, many seniors are not able to obtain care from a naturopathic physician despite their desire to do so.

Of those seniors who would consider seeing a naturopathic physician, only 23% would do so if they had to pay the full cost of the visit out of pocket. However, when Medicare coverage is an option for individuals who would consider seeing a naturopathic physician, the picture is much different. Nearly

100% of respondents said they would consider seeking care from a naturopathic physician if the naturopathic physician were included in Medicare.

ABOUT NATUROPATHIC MEDICINE

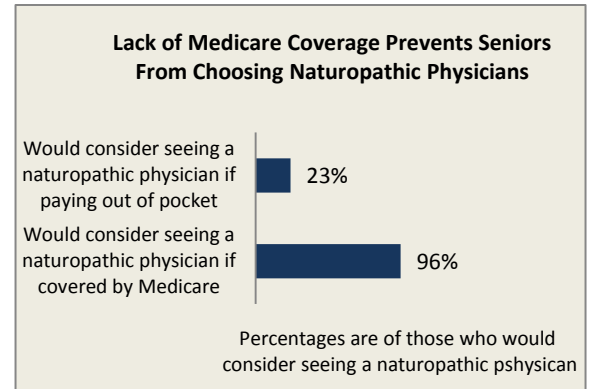
According to the AANP, naturopathic medicine is a distinct primary health care profession, emphasizing prevention, treatment, and optimal health. Naturopathic physicians use therapeutic methods and substances that encourage the individual's inherent self-healing process. Naturopathic practice includes such diagnostic and therapeutic modalities as: clinical and laboratory diagnostic testing; nutritional medicine; botanical medicine; naturopathic manipulative therapy; immunizations; patient counseling; minor surgery; homeopathy; acupuncture; prescription medication; intravenous and injection therapy; and naturopathic obstetrics (natural childbirth).

Licensed naturopathic physicians attend four-year, naturopathic medical schools that derive their accreditation from the U.S. Department of Education. They are educated in the same basic sciences as MDs. They also study holistic and nontoxic approaches to preventing disease, optimizing wellness, and treating disease. To become licensed, a naturopathic physician must take a rigorous professional licensing exam. Naturopathic physicians are currently licensed in 20 States and Territories.

ABOUT INFOSURV

Founded in 1998, Infosurv is a leading market research firm with offices in Atlanta, GA and Denver, CO. Infosurv is committed to delivering insightful survey research to our clients. Infosurv has now served over 350 unique clients ranging from Fortune 50 companies to small non-profits.

For more information, please visit www.infosurv.com.



ⁱ "Drug Side Effects Explained." WebMD, <http://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/drug-side-effects-explained>. Accessed March 24, 2014.

ⁱⁱ Lazarou J, Pomeranz BH, Corey PN. Incidence of adverse drug reactions in hospitalized patients: A meta-analysis of prospective studies. *Journal of the American Medical Association* Apr 15, 1998; 279(15): 1200 - 1205.