

Large Numbers of People are Not Very Confident in Their Own Knowledge and the Safety of Prescription Medications and This Often Leads to Non-Adherence

Patients' lack of confidence in their own knowledge, and concerns about drug safety can lead them to not take prescribed medications as directed.

A recent survey by Harris Interactive found that patients' lack of confidence in drug safety and their experiences with adverse reactions to prescribed medications leads to non-adherence, which includes not taking prescription medications as directed (non-compliance) and not filling prescriptions over time (lack of persistence). This study found that while the majority of adults are confident in their knowledge and the safety of prescribed medications, large numbers of people remain who are not. Substantial numbers of people are also concerned about the possibility of adverse reactions to prescription drugs. In addition, large numbers of people report they have personally experienced adverse reactions to prescribed medications. Significantly, their concerns about drug safety and their experiences with adverse reactions have resulted in self-reported non-adherence including people not taking a prescribed medication, not filling a prescription, or stopping a drug treatment altogether. Finally, most people support the idea of a nationwide drug safety monitoring program.

These are some of the results of a nationwide survey of 1,726 adults interviewed online between October 20 and October 30, 2006. The survey was conducted for the Pharmaceutical Safety Institute. The survey was designed to represent the general public, except that it excluded people who work in the health care industry, for a regulatory agency, or who are health care providers.

Confidence in prescription medications

Substantial numbers of patients report they are not very confident in their own knowledge and the safety of prescribed medications.

- 49% of adults who have ever taken a prescription medication report they are only "Fairly confident", "Somewhat confident", or "Not at all confident" in their knowledge about these medications.
- 46% of adults currently taking prescription medications report they are only "Fairly confident", "Somewhat confident", or "Not at all confident" that their prescribed medications are safe.

Concerns and experiences with adverse reactions

In addition, almost one-half of patients report they are concerned about adverse reactions and more than one-third report having had an adverse reaction to a prescription medication.

- 46% of all adults report they are “Extremely concerned” or “Very concerned” about adverse reactions (i.e. unexpected and severe reactions) to prescription drugs when taken as directed.
- More than a third (35%) of all adults who have ever taken a prescription medication report having had an adverse reaction.

Adverse reactions and Non-adherence

Importantly, these concerns and experiences lead to non-adherence.

- 35% of people who have ever taken a prescription medication reported they had *decided not to take a prescription drug* because they had a concern about a potential adverse reaction.
- 27% of people who have ever taken a prescription medication reported they had *decided not to fill a prescription* because they had a concern about a potential adverse reaction.
- 94% of people who have had an adverse reaction reported they had *stopped taking a medication* due to an adverse reaction.

Drug Safety

Many people would be willing to participate in a nationwide drug monitoring program and believe such a program would have an impact on drug safety in the United States.

- 36% of adults reported they would be “Absolutely certain” or “Very likely” to participate in a nationwide program that monitors the safety of their prescription medications.
- 47% of adults believed a nationwide program that monitors prescription drug safety would have a “Very strong” or “Strong impact” on improving drug safety.

Table 1
Concerns About Drug Safety And Non-Adherence

Statement	%
Percent of adults currently taking prescription medications who are fairly, somewhat, or not at all confident in their knowledge about these medications.	49
Percent of adults who have ever taken a prescription medication who are fairly, somewhat or not at all confident that their prescribed medication was safe.	46
Percent of all adults who are extremely or very concerned about adverse reactions (i.e. unexpected and severe reactions) to prescription drugs when taken as directed.	46
Proportion of adults who have ever taken a prescription medication and have ever had an adverse reaction to a prescribed medication.	35
Proportion of adults who have ever taken a prescription medication and have ever decided not to take a prescription drug because they had a concern about a potential adverse reaction.	35
Proportion of adults who have ever taken a prescription medication and have ever decided not to fill a prescription because they had a concern about a potential adverse reaction.	27
Proportion of adults who have had an adverse reaction and have stopped taking a medication due to an adverse reaction.	94
Percentage of all adults who would be absolutely certain or very likely to participate in a nationwide program that monitors the safety of their prescription medications.	36
Percentage of all adults who think a nationwide program that monitors prescription drug safety would have a very strong or strong impact on improving drug safety.	47

The problem of patient concern and non-adherence

The results of this study suggest that people's concerns about drug safety negatively affect their adherence to prescription drug treatment regimens. This is important because non-adherence can lead to aggravated or untreated medical conditions potentially resulting in unnecessary and expensive hospitalizations. Because self-reporting of non-adherence is widely recognized to be under-reported in surveys of this type, it is likely that this issue affects a significantly greater portion of patients than are represented in this survey. Therefore, this problem merits further investigation. The suggested relationship between patient concern and non-adherence highlights the need for increased attention to drug safety and programs designed to address the problem of drug safety.

Methodology

This Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States between October 20 and October 30, 2006 among a nationwide cross section of 1,726 adults (aged 18 and over). The survey was designed to represent the general public, except that it excluded people who work in the health care industry, for a regulatory agency or who are health care providers. Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All surveys are subject to several sources of error. These include: sampling error (because only a sample of a population is interviewed); measurement error due to question wording and/or question order, deliberately or unintentionally inaccurate responses, nonresponse (including refusals), interviewer effects (when live interviewers are used) and weighting.

With one exception (sampling error) the magnitude of the errors that result cannot be estimated. There is, therefore, no way to calculate a finite "margin of error" for any survey and the use of these words should be avoided.

With pure probability samples, with 100 percent response rates, it is possible to calculate the probability that the sampling error (but not other sources of error) is not greater than some number. With a pure probability sample of 1,726 adults one could say with a ninety-five percent probability that the overall results have a sampling error of +/- two percentage points. However that does not take other sources of error into account. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

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