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Prescription Drug Compliance a Significant Challenge for Many Patients, According to New National Survey

One in three (33%) U.S. adults who have been prescribed drugs to take on a regular basis report that they are often or very often noncompliant with their treatment regimens for any number of reasons. Furthermore, nearly half (45%) say they have failed to take their medications because of concerns they had about the drugs themselves, and 43 percent report having not complied with their regimens because they felt the drug was unnecessary.

These are some of the results of a Harris Interactive online survey of 2,507 U.S. adults conducted between March 16 and 18, 2005 for The Wall Street Journal Online's Health Industry Edition.

Of the 63 percent of adults who have had prescription drugs prescribed to them in the last year, drugs which are to be taken regularly, nearly two-thirds (64%) report that they have simply forgotten to take their medication, with 11 percent saying that this has happened "often" or "very often." Other top reasons respondents cited for noncompliance with their treatment regimens include:

- I had no symptoms or the symptoms went away (36%);
- I wanted to save money (35%);
- I didn't believe the drugs were effective (33%);
- I didn't think I needed to take them (31%);
- I had painful or frightening side effects (28%); and
- The drugs prevented me from doing other things I wanted to do (25%).

"Compliance problems are rampant for reasons that are multitudinous and varied," states Katherine Binns, senior vice president of healthcare research at Harris Interactive. "These barriers leading to noncompliance present significant challenges to physicians and the U.S. healthcare system as a whole that will be difficult to address."

Health Care Poll

TABLE 1

Taking Prescription Drugs on a Regular Basis

"In the last year, have you been prescribed any medical drugs which you were supposed to take on a regular basis? By "take on a regular basis" we mean any prescription that required you to take multiple doses on a specific schedule, from a medication you'd take for just a few days up to something you'd be taking for the rest of your life, and anything in between."

Base: All Adults

	All Adults	Age					
		18-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	50-64	65+
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes, drugs prescribed	63	44	50	51	59	76	84
No, drugs not prescribed	36	55	49	47	40	22	16
Not sure/Can't remember	1	2	1	2	1	1	-

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 2

Reasons for Noncompliance

"Please review this list of why people sometimes do not always take the drugs prescribed for them and say for each one how often you think it has happened to you in the last year."

Base: Those with any drugs prescribed in the last year

	Failed to Take Rx Drugs (NET)	Very Often/ Often (NET)	Very Often	Often	From Time to Time/ A Few Times/ Once or Twice (NET)	From Time to Time	A Few Times	Once or Twice	Never
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
I forgot to take them	64	11	4	8	53	12	15	25	36
I had no symptoms or the symptoms went away	36	9	3	6	26	9	8	10	64
I wanted to save money	35	14	8	6	21	5	5	11	65
I didn't believe the drugs were effective	33	7	3	4	26	8	5	13	67
I didn't think I needed to take them	31	7	3	4	25	6	6	12	69
I had painful or frightening side effects	28	7	2	4	21	5	6	10	72
The drugs prevented me from doing other things I wanted to do	25	7	3	4	18	6	4	8	75
Nobody reminded me to keep taking it or to refill my prescription	20	7	2	4	13	3	3	7	80
I had difficulty getting the prescription filled	20	4	2	2	16	4	4	8	80
The drugs tasted or smelled unpleasant	19	5	2	3	14	4	4	6	81
I had difficulty opening the bottle or swallowing the drug	16	3	2	2	12	4	4	5	84
I was confused by all the drugs I had to take	15	4	1	2	11	3	3	6	85

Health Care Poll

TABLE 3

Summary of Compliance Problems

Base: Those with any drugs prescribed in the last year

	Total
	%
Percent who are often or very often non-compliant for any reason	33
Percent who have been non-compliant because of concerns about the drug itself	45*
Percent who have been non-compliant because they felt the drug was unnecessary	43**

* Includes all respondents who said "once or twice, a few times, from time to time, often or very often" to at least one of the following reasons: "I didn't believe the drugs were effective," "I had painful or frightening side effects," "the drug tasted or smelled unpleasant."

** Includes all respondents who said "once or twice, a few times, from time to time, often or very often" to at least one of the following reasons: "I didn't think I needed to take them," "I had no symptoms or the symptoms went away."

Downloadable PDFs of Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Polls are posted at http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/newsletters_wsj.asp.

Methodology

This poll was conducted online in the United States between March 16 and 18, 2005 among a nationwide cross section of 2,507 adults aged 18 and over, of whom 1,648 have had drugs prescribed to them in the last year, drugs to be taken regularly for at least a few days or up to a lifetime. Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, income and region were weighted where necessary to align with population proportions. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

In theory, with probability samples of this size, one could say with 95 percent certainty that the results for the overall sample have a sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points. Sampling error for the results of adults who have had drugs prescribed to them in the last year is plus or minus 4 percentage points. Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in polls or surveys that are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. This includes refusals to be interviewed (nonresponse), question wording and question order, and weighting. It is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors. This online sample was not a probability sample.

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

About the Survey

The Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Poll is an exclusive poll that is published in the award-winning Health Industry Edition of The Wall Street Journal Online at www.wsj.com/health.



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