

## Many U.S. Adults Believe Healthcare Quality Can be Fairly Assessed, but Few Willing to Pay Significantly Higher Premiums for Superior Care

A new Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Poll shows that many U.S. adults believe it is fair to assess healthcare quality, but they are ambivalent and confused about whether or not payments to doctors and hospitals should be linked to quality metrics. Half of all adults (49%) believe there are fair and reliable ways to measure and compare the quality of care provided by different hospitals and medical groups. However, only one in five (19%) adults think it would be fair for patients to pay more to be treated by medical groups or hospitals that have been shown to provide better care, and fewer adults (14%) say they themselves would be willing to pay a significantly higher premium for such care.

These are some of the results of a Harris Interactive online survey of 2,123 U.S. adults conducted between March 20 and 22, 2006 for The Wall Street Journal Online's Health Industry Edition.

One-third (33%) of all adults favor health insurance plans paying more to hospitals and medical groups that have been shown to provide better care and paying less to those that have not. This is down from 44 percent in 2003. At the same time, the percentage of adults who are uncertain about this has increased, with over half (54%) currently saying they are unsure, compared to 40 percent in 2003.

Adults are less likely today (49%) than they were three years ago (58%) to think there are fair and reliable ways to measure and compare the quality of care provided by different hospitals and medical groups. In addition, many (57%) adults don't think it would be fair for patients to pay more, and 55 percent say they would not be willing to pay a significantly higher premium themselves to be treated by medical groups or hospitals that have been shown to provide better care.

### Fairness of Specific Methods Used to Evaluate Healthcare Quality

When asking about various methods healthcare plans could use to measure and compare quality of care provided by medical groups, more than two-thirds (69%) of adults think it would be fair to do this by using patient satisfaction surveys. Other methods for measuring quality that substantial numbers of adults believe would be fair to use include:

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- Medical tests that measure how well doctors are managing patients with chronic medical conditions (61%)
- Assessments by third party organizations that monitor healthcare quality (57%)
- Frequency of preventive screening tests (55%)
- Electronic medical records and other information tolls (47%)
- Malpractice suits (41%)

Between one-fifth and one-third of adults are not sure whether or not they think these six specific methods for measuring and comparing the quality of care provided by medical groups are fair.

Katherine Binns, President of the Healthcare and Public Relations Research Practice at Harris Interactive, comments: “To the extent that the public understands the concept of assessing quality, many feel it’s fair to use a variety of metrics to do so; these range from third party assessments and medical test results for patients with chronic medical conditions to patient satisfaction surveys. What they don’t want to see, however, is health plans charging more for access to high quality providers and they don’t want to see doctors’ getting paid more or less based on quality ratings.”

**TABLE 1**  
**“Pay for Performance” Health Insurance Plans**

“Do you favor or oppose health insurance plans paying more to hospitals and medical groups which have been shown to provide better care and paying less to those which have not?”

Base: All Adults

	Total	
	2003	2006
	%	%
Favor	44	33
Oppose	16	13
Not sure	40	54

**TABLE 2**  
**Fairness and Reliability of Measuring and Comparing Quality of Care**

“Do you think there are fair and reliable ways to measure and compare the quality of care provided by different hospitals and different medical groups?”

Base: All Adults

	Total	
	2003	2006
	%	%
There are fair and reliable ways	58	49
There are not any fair and reliable ways	11	16
Not sure	31	35

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**TABLE 3**

**Fairness of Patients Having to Pay More for Higher Quality Care**

“Do you think it would be fair for patients to pay more to be treated by medical groups or hospitals which have been shown to provide better care or not?”

Base: All Adults

	Total	
	2003	2006
	%	%
Fair for patients to pay more	18	19
Not fair for patients to pay more	64	57
Not sure	18	24

**TABLE 4**

**Willingness to Pay Higher Premiums to Get to Higher Quality Providers**

“Would you be willing to pay a significantly higher premium for a health insurance plan which covered you to go to hospitals and medical groups which have been shown to provide superior care?”

Base: All Adults

	Total	
	2003	2006
	%	%
Would be willing to pay a significantly higher premium	16	14
Would not be willing to pay a significantly higher premium	60	55
Not sure	23	31

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

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**TABLE 5**

**Fairness of Seven Methods Used to Measure and Compare Quality of Care**

“Please indicate whether or not you think it would be fair for health plans to measure and compare the quality of care provided by medical groups using the following methods?”

Base: All Adults

		Fair	Not Fair	Not Sure
Patient satisfaction surveys	%	69	9	21
Frequency of preventive screening tests (like blood pressure readings, blood tests for cholesterol diabetes and tests for osteoporosis)	%	55	17	29
Medical tests that measure how well doctors are managing patients with chronic medical conditions (like heart disease, diabetes, and asthma and high cholesterol)	%	61	11	28
The use of electronic medical records and other information tools	%	47	21	32
Assessments by third party organizations that monitor healthcare quality (like the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations [JCAHO], National Committee for Quality Assurance [NCQA], and Foundation in Accountability [FACCT])	%	57	11	32
Assessments by medical boards	%	58	13	29
Malpractice suits	%	41	27	32

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

Downloadable PDFs of Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Polls are posted at [http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/newsletters\\_wsj.asp](http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/newsletters_wsj.asp).

## Methodology

Harris Interactive conducted this online survey within the United States between March 20 and 22, 2006 among a national cross section of 2,123 adults, ages 18 years and over. Figures for age, gender, 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 overall results have a sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points of what they would be if the entire U.S. adult population had been polled with complete accuracy. Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in all polls or surveys that are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. They include refusals to be interviewed (non-response), question wording and question order, interviewer bias, weighting by demographic control data and screening (e.g., for likely voters). It is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors. This online sample is not a probability sample.

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

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## 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](http://www.wsj.com/health).

## About The Wall Street Journal Online

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In 2005, the Online Journal was awarded a Codie Award for Best Online News Service for the second consecutive year, and its Health Industry Edition was awarded Best Online Science or Technology Service for the third consecutive year. In 2004, the Online Journal received an EPPy Award for Best Internet Business Service over 1 million monthly visitors.

The Wall Street Journal Online network includes [CareerJournal.com](http://CareerJournal.com), [OpinionJournal.com](http://OpinionJournal.com), [StartupJournal.com](http://StartupJournal.com), [RealEstateJournal.com](http://RealEstateJournal.com) and [CollegeJournal.com](http://CollegeJournal.com).



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Harris Interactive Inc. ([www.harrisinteractive.com](http://www.harrisinteractive.com)), based in Rochester, New York, is the 13th largest and the fastest-growing market research firm in the world, most widely known for *The Harris Poll*® and for its pioneering leadership in the online market research industry. Long recognized by its clients for delivering insights that enable confident business decisions, the Company blends the science of innovative research with the art of strategic consulting to deliver knowledge that leads to measurable and enduring value.

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To become a member of the Harris Poll Online<sup>SM</sup> and be invited to participate in future online surveys, go to [www.harrispollonline.com](http://www.harrispollonline.com).

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