

U.S. Adults Lack Knowledge but Have Concerns about Common Treatments for Patients with ADHD

A new Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Poll shows that majorities of adults in the United States think that attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) drugs are prescribed too often for children (61%) and teens (51%), but they have relatively little knowledge of their safety and effectiveness. Nonetheless, it appears that the public would rather see the FDA err on the side of caution as the vast majority (68%) of adults believe the FDA should require a stronger warning label about potential risks for psychiatric and cardiac problems that can affect young people taking ADHD drugs.

These are some of the results of a Harris Interactive online survey of 2,237 U.S. adults conducted between April 5 and 7, 2006 for The Wall Street Journal Online's Health Industry Edition.

Efficacy

In regard to the effectiveness of prescription drugs used to treat people with ADHD, the survey shows that substantial numbers of adults are not sure if these drugs are effective in treating this condition or in providing quality of life benefits that override potential risks.

- At least half of all adults say they are not sure about the effectiveness of prescription drugs in treating adults (56%), teenagers (52%) and children (50%). For those who do have an opinion, similar numbers of adults think the drugs are effective or very effective (24% to 27%) as do those who think they are not very or not at all effective (20% to 23%).
- Slightly more than a third (35%) of adults say they somewhat or strongly agree that effective treatments for patients with ADHD provide quality of life benefits that override the rare potential risks of psychiatric and cardiac problems patients sometimes experience with these treatments, while one-quarter (26%) somewhat or strongly disagrees with this. About two in five (39%) are not sure.

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Safety

Approximately two in five adults are not sure how safe ADHD drugs are for treating adults (43%), teenagers (41%) and children under age 13 (40%). However, adults are more likely to think that these drugs are not very or not at all safe for children under age 13 (41%) and teenagers (37%) than they are for adults (28%).

- While the public is split on whether they think these drugs are safe or not for adults being treated for ADHD (29% safe/very safe vs. 28% not very/not at all safe), when it comes to teenagers and children, the public is more likely to say these drugs are not very or not at all safe (37% for teens and 41% for children) than safe or very safe (22% for teens and 20% for children).
- While approximately three in ten (29%) adults somewhat or strongly agree that doctors generally do a good job advising patients and parents about the risks and benefits of ADHD drugs, 34 percent somewhat or strongly disagree with this and another 37 percent are not sure.
- A plurality (49%) of adults admit they are not sure, based on what they know or have heard, whether or not some ADHD drugs are safer than others.

Likelihood of taking ADHD drugs if recommended

Perhaps due to the lack of knowledge or concerns some have about prescription drugs to treat ADHD, if they personally were diagnosed with this condition, only a third (32%) of adults say they would be very or somewhat likely to take one of the drugs if their doctor recommended it. Almost two in five (38%) say they would be not very or not at all likely to take their doctor's recommendation and 27 percent say they are not sure.

TABLE 1

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

For Treating:		Very Effective/ Effective (NET)	Very Effective	Effective	Not Very/ Not At All Effective (NET)	Not Very Effective	Not At All Effective	Not Sure
Adults	%	24	5	19	20	12	8	56
Teenagers	%	25	6	19	23	15	9	52
Children under the age 13	%	27	7	20	23	13	10	50

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

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TABLE 2

Perceived Safety of ADHD Drugs

"Based on what you know or have heard, how safe do you think these ADHD drugs are for treating each of the following?"

Base: All Adults

For Treating:		Very Safe/ Safe (NET)	Very Safe	Safe	Not Very/ Not At All Safe (NET)	Not Very Safe	Not At All Safe	Not Sure
Adults	%	29	4	25	28	17	11	43
Teenagers	%	22	3	19	37	24	13	41
Children under the age 13	%	20	3	17	41	24	17	40

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

TABLE 3

Prescription of ADHD Drugs

"Overall, do you think ADHD drugs are prescribed too often, not often enough, or as often as they should be for treating each of the following?"

Base: All Adult

For Treating:		Too Often	Not Often Enough	As Often As They Should Be	Not Sure
Adults	%	32	11	15	42
Teenagers	%	51	4	10	35
Children under the age 13	%	61	2	7	30

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TABLE 4

Perceptions of Safety and Efficacy of ADHD Drugs

“Based on what you know or have heard, to what extent would you agree or disagree with the following statements about ADHD drugs?”

Base: All Adults

For Treating:		Agree Strongly/ Agree Somewhat (NET)	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly/ Disagree Somewhat (NET)	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly	Not Sure
Doctors generally do a good job advising patients and parents about the risks and benefits of ADHD drugs.	%	29	7	22	34	22	12	37
Effective treatments for patients with ADHD provide quality of life benefits that override the rare potential risks of psychiatric and cardiac problems patients sometimes experience with these treatments.	%	35	8	27	26	17	9	39
Some ADHD drugs are safer than others.	%	36	10	27	14	8	7	49
The FDA should require a stronger warning label about the rare potential risks for psychiatric and cardiac problems that can affect young people who take ADHD drugs.	%	68	49	19	6	4	2	26

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

TABLE 5

Likelihood of Taking ADHD Drugs When Recommended by a Physician

“If you were diagnosed with ADHD, how likely would you be to take one of the drugs if your doctor recommended it? Please select the one best answer below.”

Base: All Adults

	Total
	%
Very Likely/Somewhat (NET)	32
Very likely	10
Somewhat likely	22
Not Very/Not At All Likely (NET)	38
Not very likely	20
Not at all likely	18
Been Diagnosed (NET)	3
I have been diagnosed with ADHD and I take prescription drugs to treat the condition	1
I have been diagnosed with ADHD and I have decided not to take prescription drugs to treat the condition	1
Not sure	27

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

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

Methodology

Harris Interactive conducted this online survey within the United States between April 5 and 7, 2006 among a national cross section of 2,237 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.

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 pure probability samples of 2,237 adults, one could say with a 95 percent probability that the results have a sampling error of +/- 3 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.

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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