

Most People Unaware of Nationwide Pharmacist Shortage, According to Survey

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VALLEY FORGE, Pa., July 11 /PRNewswire/ -- Despite widespread media coverage of the nationwide pharmacist shortage, 64 percent of respondents in a national survey said they were unaware of the situation. And only 19 percent said the shortage concerned them, which would seem to indicate that despite the shortage pharmacists have been able to meet the needs of their customers. When asked whether the pharmacist shortage has had an impact on certain aspects of a pharmacist's job, 48 percent said it could affect the time it takes to fill a prescription. Forty-six percent said it could increase medication errors, while 44 percent cited its effect on the hours a pharmacist has to work. Last on the list, at 36 percent, was personal attention and counseling services - another sign that pharmacists were continuing to serve the consumer well in spite of personnel shortages.

As for filling the ranks of pharmacists from the general population, the survey results were less than encouraging. Eighty-two percent of respondents said they had not considered a career as a pharmacist nor had they recommended it to someone they knew. Twenty-nine percent of respondents suggested that "better compensation" might encourage more people to enter the field, over other options such as simplifying insurance procedures, less paperwork and improved working conditions.

These findings were revealed in the latest AmerisourceBergen Index(C), which surveyed 1044 people nationwide on a range of topics including the reasons for selecting a hospital and pharmacy, ways to increase customer comfort, and options for the pharmacy of the future.

The quarterly survey was conducted by Opinion Research Corporation on behalf of AmerisourceBergen, the largest pharmaceutical services company in the United States dedicated solely to the pharmaceutical supply chain.

Trust and Personalized Attention Place First

For the first time since the AmerisourceBergen Index was launched in April 2001, trust and personalized attention emerged as the top reason for selecting a pharmacy. One-quarter of respondents chose this over six other criteria. The other options were: accepts insurance card (24 percent), location (19 percent), low prices (15 percent), fast service (8 percent), hours of operation (4 percent), and delivery service (2 percent). As in previous AmerisourceBergen Index surveys, trust and personalized service came in even higher among respondents 55 and over, who purchase more medications than any other group. Thirty-four percent of adults 55-64 years old cited this as their top criterion, as did 35 percent of senior citizens (65+).

When it comes to choosing a hospital, reputation scored higher than any other criterion, with 27 percent of all respondents selecting this. Next was having a personal physician at the hospital (19 percent), followed by accepting a person's insurance (16 percent). Physician referral and location tied at 10 percent. Sixteen percent of respondents said they did not have a choice of hospitals.

Prescription Pagers?

Will pharmacists soon follow in the footsteps of restaurants by providing customers with pagers to let them know when their prescriptions are ready? If so, they are likely to find a sizeable customer base for this service. Survey respondents expressed a clear preference for being on the go and getting beeped when prescriptions are ready as opposed to hanging around the store - even if waiting conditions were quite comfortable.

Thirty percent of respondents picked electronic pagers as their top choice for making their trip to the pharmacy more comfortable. Sedentary options, such as reclining chairs and magazines, were a distant second, at 12 percent, followed by samples of health and diet foods (11 percent) and complimentary beverages (9 percent).

High Ratings for Prescription Information

The detailed information that accompanies most new prescriptions is highly valued by consumers, with 94 percent of survey respondents ranking them as "somewhat or very important." Eighty-three percent of all respondents said they considered them "very important," as did 89 percent of senior citizens (65+). Given this response it's not surprising that 61 percent of all respondents said they found this information useful. These percentages were even higher among women and seniors, with 70 percent and 71 percent respectively saying they found prescription information quite useful.

Pharmacy of the Future

Once again, the AmerisourceBergen Index asked people what services they would like to see in the pharmacy of the future. Twenty-four hour service came in first out of a list of choices among 43 percent of respondents. It scored even higher among women and among younger respondents 18-34, with 48 percent in these categories selecting this choice.

A doctor on call by phone or computer came in second with 22 percent of respondents, followed by the ability to place an order over the Internet and pick it up at later time, at 20 percent. Not surprisingly, this option was most popular among the youngest group of respondents -- 18-to-24-year-olds -- with 24 percent making this their top choice.

About the AmerisourceBergen Index

The AmerisourceBergen Index is a quarterly survey of trends, purchasing behaviors and opinions about pharmacists and their customers. The first survey was conducted in May 2001.

About AmerisourceBergen

AmerisourceBergen (NYSE: ABC) is the largest pharmaceutical services company in the United States dedicated solely to the pharmaceutical supply chain. It is the leading distributor of pharmaceutical products and services to the hospital systems/acute care market, alternate care and mail order facilities, independent community pharmacies, and regional chain pharmacies. The Company is also a leader in the institutional pharmacy marketplace. With more than \$39 billion in annualized operating revenue, AmerisourceBergen is headquartered in Valley Forge, PA, and employs

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