

Survey finds patients want more guidance from physicians on self-care

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Physicians and consumers agree that self-care is important to health and well-being, yet 75 percent of patients say they haven't discussed self-care with their physician within the last two years, according to a new survey released today, conducted by The Harris Poll on behalf of Samueli Integrative Health Programs. Nearly half of doctors (46%) say patients do not seem very interested in the topic, while a majority of patients (72%) say they are interested in discussing self-care with their healthcare provider, which includes lifestyle changes, healthy diet, regular exercise, stress management, and other alternatives to conventional medical treatment.

"Encouraging patients to incorporate [self-care](#) practices into their daily lives is not only important for their health, it's a critical component in reducing our country's chronic disease burden," said Wayne Jonas, MD, executive director of Samueli Integrative Health Programs. "In order to truly make a difference in the health of our patients, the future of primary care—indeed all healthcare—must address the patient as a whole person and take an integrative health approach to guide and support healthy behaviors outside the clinic."

The survey—involving more than 1,000 U.S. adults ages 18 and older and more than 300 [family medicine](#) and internal medicine physicians—found that while more than nine in 10 physicians (96%) say self-care should be considered an essential part of a patient's overall health, only 39 percent of consumers say they practice it often. The survey was conducted online by The Harris Poll on behalf of Samueli

Integrative Health Programs in May and June 2019.

What is Self-Care?

The survey found that despite common depictions of self-care as indulgences such as shopping and pampering, consumers understand that self-care is a broad concept that encompasses physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual needs. They report their top self-care practices as getting enough sleep (66%), eating healthy foods (62%), taking care of their mental health (60%), and exercising (59%).

Patients Want More Guidance

Although physicians think patients have limited interest in such topics, a majority of patients would be interested in talking to their doctors about what's important in their lives (57%), and about their life goals (55%). About two-thirds of patients wish their [physician](#) shared more resources on self-care (66%), were involved in all aspects of their health management (65%), and incorporated complementary and alternative therapies into their care (64%).

"What these results show us is that patients have a strong desire for their physicians to be involved in more aspects of their health—beyond pills and procedures," said Jonas. "They want a fuller partnership and a relationship where they can discuss their health and well-being in other, deeper ways that impact them. As physicians, it's important that we listen to these desires and adjust how we treat our patients. We need to organize our practices to support behavior change."

Barriers and Disconnects

Doctor-patient disconnects emerged on several points:

Despite knowing the importance of self-care, 43 percent of consumers say they have more pressing issues to focus on, and more than one in four (28%) say they feel guilty when practicing self-care. Women are more likely than men to cite any barriers to self-care (77% vs. 68%). Specifically, women are more likely to be too tired (31% vs. 20%) or to feel guilty for taking time for themselves (16% vs. 7%).

The top reason that physicians cite for not discussing topics related to self-care more often is a lack of time during appointments (78%). More than nine in 10 (93%) would like to be able to provide their patients more information on self-care, but only one in four (26%) feel very confident in doing so.

Other highlights of the study findings include:

- Forty-four percent of consumers believe self-care is only possible for people with enough time, and 35 percent believe self-care is only possible for those with enough money.
- 80 percent of physicians say it's very important for them personally to practice self-care, but only 57 percent report doing so often.
- A majority of physicians (59%) say the demands of their job prevent them from practicing self-care as much as they would like.
- One in four physicians (25%) report that feeling burnt out prevents them from practicing self-care.
- Nearly the same proportion of physicians and consumers say they are prevented from practicing self-care because they are unable to get out of bad habits (20% and 19%, respectively).

Provided by The Reis Group

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