

Survey Respondents Select Bar Coding as Top Method for Reducing Medication Errors

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New AmerisourceBergen Index(R) Addresses How to Pay for New Technologies, Why Patients Select a Hospital and Other Topics

VALLEY FORGE, Pa., Dec. 9 /PRNewswire/ -- Barcode scanning systems, which scan medications and patient identification bracelets at hospital bedsides to verify patients are receiving the correct medications, were the top choice for preventing medication errors in the latest AmerisourceBergen Index(R) released today.

Thirty-nine percent of respondents selected bar code scanning systems over computerized physician order entry (CPOE) systems that allow physicians to enter prescriptions via handheld computers. CPOE was selected by one quarter of those surveyed. Greater use of automated technologies to count pills and check prescriptions before they are dispensed came in next at 15 percent. Thirteen percent of respondents said all three of these methods were the best way to reduce medication errors.

In another question, nearly three-quarters of respondents said government should require hospitals to adopt new technologies if they have been proven to reduce medication errors. These technologies also scored high in a question about what would have the most impact on patient safety in hospitals. Technologies that reduce the potential for human error by verifying and checking medications almost tied with the top choice - hiring more doctors and nurses. The other two options for impacting patient safety - higher salaries for healthcare workers and increasing government regulation - lagged far behind.

Gender, Geographical and Age Differences

As one might expect in a survey about health systems technologies there were age, geographical and gender differences. Younger respondents and men tended to favor new technologies without cost concerns and were more solidly in favor of communicating with physicians via e-mail for instance, while older respondents and women tended to prefer personal interaction over technologies and electronic communication.

Health Information and the Internet

Obtaining health information via the Internet was another topic covered in the survey. Just under one third of respondents said they used the Internet to obtain more information after receiving a diagnosis or medication from a physician.

What about e-mailing physicians for information? Slightly more than half of all respondents said they would like to communicate with their physicians via e-mail, with men, 18-to-54-year-olds, West Coast residents and city dwellers expressing the most interest. Somewhat smaller numbers said they did not wish to contact their physicians via e-mail -- especially those 55 and older, residents of rural areas and people in the North Central and Southern United States. Only a very small number said they already communicated with their physicians via e-mail.

When asked to rate the quality of the health information on the web, nearly one third described it as accurate and helpful, while 15 percent said it was easy to understand. Far fewer described the information in a negative way - as difficult to understand or not accurate enough. However, more than one quarter said they did not obtain health information on the Internet. Once again, use of the Internet and perceptions of its value as a health resource varied greatly depending upon the age of the respondents.

Another question that elicited a strong response was about electronic medical records. Sixty-two percent said medical records should be electronic with paper backup. Here, too, 25-to-34-year-old respondents were even more enthusiastic about this.

Hospital Selection Criteria

Why do people choose a particular hospital? The reputation of its physicians came in first among all respondents, at 29 percent. This was even more important to people in the Northeastern United States and 18-to-24-year-olds, who chose this in far greater numbers. Accepting an insurance plan came in second, at 24 percent for all respondents and 32 percent in the North Central region. This was followed by a strong patient safety record (15 percent), clean, hygienic facility (12 percent), and nonprofit status (3 percent). Sixteen percent said all these factors played a role in determining their choice of a particular hospital.

Lastly, in ranking the top health issues that hospitals should focus on in 2004 cancer led the list, followed by diabetes, heart disease, obesity and AIDS. Diabetes was of much greater concern to adults 55-to-64 than among the general population and AIDS was more important to 18-to-34-year-olds. Bioterrorism and SARS were ranked last, with only 5 percent and 1 percent, respectively, selecting these as top health issues.

Survey Methodology

The AmerisourceBergen Index(R) is a survey of trends, purchasing behaviors and opinions about pharmacists and their customers. The current survey of 1020 adults was conducted by telephone from November 28-30, 2003 by Opinion Research Corporation on behalf of AmerisourceBergen, the largest pharmaceutical services company in the United States dedicated solely to the pharmaceutical supply channel. The margin of error is plus or minus three percent.

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, physician's offices, alternate care and mail order facilities, independent community pharmacies, and regional chain pharmacies. The Company is also a leader in the long term care pharmacy and workers' compensation fulfillment marketplaces. With more than \$40 billion in annualized operating revenue, AmerisourceBergen is headquartered in Valley Forge, PA, and employs more than 13,000 people. AmerisourceBergen is ranked #24 on the Fortune 500 list and was ranked #6 in the 2003 Business Week 50, a list of the 50 best performing companies in the S&P 500. For more information, go to www.amerisourcebergen.com.

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