

Pharmacists Receive High Marks From Customers In Latest AmerisourceBergen Index

July 17, 2003

Survey Also Probes Effects of Economy on Prescription Purchases,
Use of the Internet for Health Research, and Ways to Improve Prescription
Dispensing

VALLEY FORGE, Pa., July 17 /PRNewswire/ -- Despite the ongoing pharmacist shortage, pharmacists still enjoy strong support from their customers, according to the latest AmerisourceBergen Index(R), a quarterly survey of trends, purchasing behaviors and opinions about pharmacists and their customers that was released today.

In fact, eight in 10 adults said they would recommend their pharmacist or pharmacy to friends or family members. And 56 percent said they were more satisfied today with the service they receive from their local pharmacies than they were a few years ago.

Interestingly, despite the reach and impact of the Internet, nearly half the respondents said they don't use it to research health or medical topics. Just 16 percent said they use the Internet "a lot" for health and medication research. Health-related web research was somewhat higher among females and 18-to-24-year-olds (20 percent and 23 percent respectively). Twenty-nine percent of all respondents said they use the Internet on an occasional basis to research health and prescription medication information.

The survey of 1,014 adults nationwide explored a variety of issues related to the retail pharmacy industry including pharmacy automation, the use of the Internet to research health and medication information, ways to improve prescription dispensing, and what people like most about their local pharmacies.

Technologies To Help Pharmacists and Customers

What's the best way to address the current pharmacist shortage? Thirty-five percent of respondents chose electronic solutions -- such as pharmacy automation and electronic verification of prescriptions and insurance coverage -- as the top way to solve this problem. Similarly, the number one choice for making it easier to pick up a prescription was having the physician transmit it directly to the pharmacy. Next on the "prescription-ease" wish list was technology that could guarantee prescriptions were filled within five to 10 minutes.

Prescriptions and the Economy

Has a weak economy and high unemployment affected people's abilities to purchase prescription medications? Eleven percent of respondents said they had been forced to forego the purchase of prescription medications because of the economy. This number was higher among 55-to-64-year-olds, with 18 percent of older Americans answering "yes" to this question. Conversely, 87 percent of all respondents and 90 percent of 25-to-54-year-olds said the economy had not affected their ability to purchase prescription medications.

Location, Location, Location

As in previous AmerisourceBergen Index surveys, location topped the list of what people like best about their pharmacies. The pharmacist was the second choice. This was followed by: accepting a customer's insurance plan and quick service. Prices and product selection were mentioned by few customers as what they like most about their pharmacies, with only 7 percent and 3 percent, respectively, selecting these.

Multiple Medication Punch Cards

The AmerisourceBergen Index also asked people if they would be willing to pay a small fee for punch card dispensing if they or someone they cared for took multiple medications on a daily basis, instead of having to handle several different bottles of medications each day. More than half answered yes. This option was even more popular among 18-to-44-year-olds, with over 60 percent in this age group in favor of punch card dispensing.

SARS Concerns Barely Register

What do people consider the most important health issue in the United States today? Obesity. This was followed by cancer, drug and alcohol abuse, heart disease, AIDS, smoking and diabetes. Despite significant news coverage, SARS was at the bottom of the list -- chosen by only 1 percent of respondents.

Survey Methodology

The quarterly telephone survey was conducted from June 5-8, 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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07/17/2003

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6370 07/17/2003 10:30 EDT <http://www.prnewswire.com>