



National Poll on Children's Health

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How to Select a Child's Doctor? Parents Prefer Grapevine to Online

Report Highlights

50% of parents say that word of mouth is very important when selecting a doctor for their children, compared with 25% of parents who say that doctor rating websites are very important.

Mothers are more likely than fathers, and parents under 30 more likely than parents 30 and over, to say that online doctor ratings are very important.

Among parents that have sought information on doctor ratings, 30% have selected a doctor based on a good rating.

As families turn online to find information, they can find many websites that rate a wide variety of goods and services—including doctors. While opinions differ about websites with doctor ratings, one thing is certain: they are more common today than ever before. However, it is not known whether parents choose doctors for their children based on website ratings and how parents view website ratings compared with other sources of information about children's doctors.

In September 2012, the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents with one or more children 0-17 years old about factors that are important when selecting a doctor for their children. This poll also measured parents' awareness and use of doctor rating websites, and their opinions about these websites.

Important Factors in Selecting a Doctor

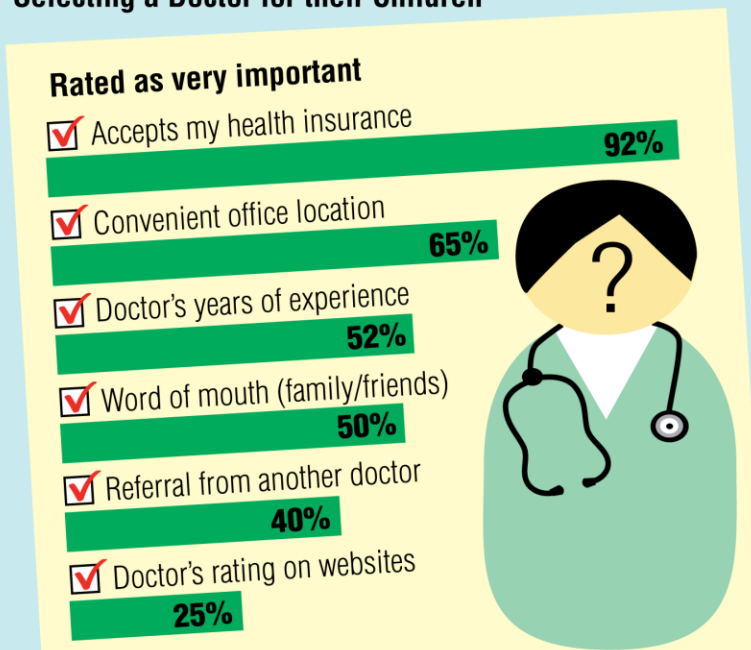
When selecting a primary care doctor for their children, the vast majority of parents (92%) say it is very important that the doctor accepts their insurance. Nearly two-thirds say that convenient location is very important, and one-half of parents report that word of mouth from family and friends is very important. In contrast, one-quarter of parents think that doctor ratings on websites are very important when selecting a doctor for their children (Figure 1).

When it comes to online doctor ratings, mothers (30%) are more likely than fathers (19%) to think such ratings are very important. In addition, parents under age 30 (44%) are more likely than parents 30 or older (21%) to think doctor rating websites are very important.

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A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics and Communicable Diseases, and the University of Michigan Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Unit.

Figure 1. **Parents' Opinions on Important Factors in Selecting a Doctor for their Children**



Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2013.

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by GfK Custom Research, LLC (GfK), for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital via a method used in many published studies. The survey was administered in September 2012 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults (n=2,137) from GfK's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 60% among the panel members contacted to participate. The margin of error is ± 2 to 8 percentage points and higher among subgroups.

Selection of a Doctor Based on Online Ratings

Among adults who seek online doctor ratings and reviews, 41% find the websites very useful, 52% somewhat useful and 7% not useful. Nearly one-third of parents (30%) who have gone online to view doctors' ratings report that they have selected a doctor for their children due to good ratings or reviews. On the other hand, nearly one-third of parents (30%) report avoiding a doctor for their children due to bad ratings or reviews.

Among the adults who have never gone online to seek doctor ratings, 43% report that they did not trust the information on doctor rating websites.

Very few adults (5%) say they have ever posted ratings or reviews of doctors. Among adults who have posted ratings, about one-half (54%) have given positive reviews, and about one-fifth (19%) have given negative reviews.

About one-quarter (26%) of adults report being concerned that leaving a negative comment could result in the doctor taking action against them.

Implications

Currently, doctor rating websites are not perceived to be as important as other types of information as parents make decisions for their children's healthcare. Nevertheless, perceived importance of online ratings appears to differ widely based on factors such as parent age and gender. For mothers and younger parents in general, higher perceptions of importance for doctor rating websites may reflect higher levels of access to, or comfort with, online ratings sources that are based on user reviews.

Importantly, there is currently no oversight or regulation for rating websites that collect 'crowdsourced' information about doctors. Issues of trust may arise regarding the reliability of the ratings or whether they are subject to manipulation in positive or negative directions. It is worth noting that word of mouth from family and friends is not regulated, either; but those sources of information may be perceived as more directly accountable by parents seeking the information, and therefore more trustworthy.

It remains to be seen how influential doctor rating websites will be, or how parents will navigate among the many choices for ratings websites in the future. Ultimately, the websites that have the greatest impact may be the sources that are perceived as most informative and trustworthy in advising parents in the selection of their children's healthcare providers. In the meantime, the time-honored grapevine—not to mention, insurance coverage and office location—remain more important to parents.

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