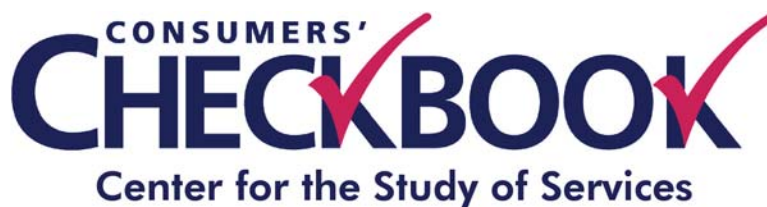


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Groundbreaking Program Collects, Publicly Reports Patients' Ratings of NYC Doctors

Consumer Organization, Major Health Plans, and Employers Collaborate on Scientifically Valid Patient Survey; Ratings Are First of Their Kind in Region

NEW YORK – New Yorkers are well-accustomed to researching and reviewing everything from restaurants to apartment buildings but, until today, never had access to scientifically valid reports allowing them to learn more about the city's doctors from actual patients. A pilot program is now reporting (via website) the results of such a survey, which asked patients how well their doctors listen and explain things, make themselves available for appointments and care when needed, arrange to have helpful and courteous office staff, and perform on other important aspects of care that patients can judge.

Consumers' CHECKBOOK/Center for the Study of Services (CHECKBOOK/CSS) has released ratings and reports on 930 individual doctors (primary-care physicians, obstetrician/gynecologists, cardiologists, gastroenterologists, and orthopedists) with offices in Manhattan. CHECKBOOK/CSS sponsored the survey in collaboration with the Northeast Business Group on Health (NEBGH) and several leading health plans: Aetna, CIGNA HealthCare, and UnitedHealthcare (including Oxford). The project demonstrates a low-cost, rigorous survey method that can be used to produce such ratings and reports on most doctors in the United States.

There are increasing numbers of websites that collect and report patient ratings of doctors. But most have fewer than five reports on most physicians. At many of these websites, it is possible for anyone (even a doctor or the doctor's staff) to "stuff the ballot box." In contrast, CHECKBOOK/CSS's reports are based on statistically valid numbers of completed surveys—an average of 49 completed patient surveys per doctor. And CHECKBOOK/CSS randomly sampled patients and verified, with the help of the health plans, that each had seen the doctor within the past year. **The reports on doctors are available free to the public at www.checkbook.org/patientcentral and can be linked to free from the NEBGH website (www.nebgh.org).**

"The surveys gather information consumers want most when choosing a doctor or evaluating a current one, and the information we are reporting can motivate and guide doctors in improving their practices," said Robert Krughoff, CHECKBOOK/CSS's president.

Research shows this information is medically important. For example, listening and explaining things are essential for getting the right diagnosis, getting patients to do their part in prevention and care, and letting patients share in decisions about whether to have tests and treatments. Doctor-patient communication, according to CHECKBOOK/CSS, is essential not only for quality but also for cutting costs by eliminating wasted care.

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“The survey shows important differences among doctors,” said Laurel Pickering, Executive Director of NEBGH. “For example, one survey question asks ‘*how often did the doctor listen carefully to you?*’ About a quarter of the 930 doctors included in the survey scored significantly better than average on that question. Among those who scored significantly better, 88 percent of their patients said the doctor ‘always’ listened carefully. Among those who scored significantly worse, only 52 percent of their patients said the doctor ‘always’ listened carefully. That’s a big difference in what patients can expect.”

The survey used questions and a survey procedure developed by the U.S. Government's Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) and endorsed by the National Quality Forum (NQF). This New York pilot project is the largest survey in the nation using these methods for public reporting on individual doctors, following the model of pilot projects CHECKBOOK/CSS has conducted in several smaller cities—Denver, Kansas City, and Memphis.

The CHECKBOOK/CSS website steers doctors to handbooks, videos, classes, and other resources from the American College of Physicians, the American Academy on Communication in Healthcare, and many other organizations that can help doctors improve on communicating with patients, scheduling of appointments, and other aspects of care measured in the survey. CHECKBOOK/CSS expects that, as the survey spreads around the country, local physician leaders will put together quality improvement programs. In addition, many of the physicians included in the survey can use the survey results in practice improvement programs required for maintaining board certification with the American Board of Internal Medicine.

The website also includes various tools to help patients do their part, including advice and videos on how to prepare for appointments, how to learn about their diseases and treatment options, and how to carry out care plans.

About Consumers' CHECKBOOK/Center for the Study of Services

CHECKBOOK/CSS is a nonprofit organization, founded in 1974, whose mission is to educate and inform consumers to help them select high-quality, reasonably priced service providers. In seven major metropolitan areas, the organization publishes magazines and offers websites (none of which carries any advertising) with ratings of various types of health care providers and also other local service providers, including auto repair shops, plumbers, and veterinarians. CHECKBOOK/CSS also administers surveys for other organizations in the health care field, including managing all of the surveys of members of Medicare Advantage health plans and Prescription Drug plans for the U.S. Government's Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. For more information, visit www.checkbook.org.

About the Northeast Business Group on Health

Northeast Business Group on Health is a network of employers, providers, insurers, and other organizations working together to improve the quality and reduce the cost of healthcare in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. Since its inception in 1982 as New York Business Group on Health, the organization has spearheaded initiatives, conducted important research, and launched innovative programs that brought meaningful change to the healthcare marketplace for employers in the New York metropolitan area. In November 2010, the organization changed its name to the Northeast Business Group on Health and expanded its mission to serve employers across the region. For more information, visit www.nebgh.org.

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