



What our Readership Survey Told Us

By Ed Rudin, MD

Does anything, let alone anything good, ever come from a survey to which you respond?

Late in 2001 we sent a dozen questions to a randomly selected 25 percent of our retired members and to 25 percent of the active status physicians in the North Area, Downtown-Central Area, South Area, El Dorado County, Yolo County, and the Permanente Medical Group. We wanted to know changes and trends in reader satisfaction and reader interest and attitudes toward medicine and practice.

The 58 percent overall response gave us 162 responses — a pulse rate, not an echogram; a guide, not conclusions. The responses ranged from a low of 33 percent from El Dorado County to a high of 72 percent from the North Area and 84 percent from retirees. That meant 50 returns from Downtown-Central, 43 from retirees, 32 from Permanente, and 21 from the North Area. Together that deserved attention.

The 8 from Yolo, 6 from South Area, and 2 from El Dorado suggested we needed to involve those physicians more. (For details and a comparison with past surveys see <http://www.ssvms.org>.)

About this magazine

Sierra Sacramento Valley Medicine is certainly not a throw-away. It captured much praise. Over four-fifths of the respondents always checked the Table of Contents. Beyond that, in declining order, they read the President's Message, the Editor's Message, Voices, and Opinions-Commentaries.

Sadly, several complained that they felt too inundated to read any publication.

Compared with 1996, there was a noteworthy rise in approval for layout and design. This year, more rated the quality of writing, design and layout, timeliness and relevance excellent and fewer rated them good. Most impressive was a 100 percent rise in those rating accuracy excellent.

As in 1996, readers liked the length of articles and the present mix of topics, but 44 percent wanted more on practice tips and issues and 37 percent wanted more on legal and legislative subjects.

The 94 percent who believed the magazine reflected members' opinions was 24 percentage points higher than in 1996. Several commented on how hard it is to reflect the diversity of opinions of our members. Our effort to present pro and con views and to publish your letters seems to have worked. The percentage who found fault with the balance dropped to a new low of 4 percent, while the group that always found balance rose from 19 percent in 1996 to 30 percent now.

The overall rating returned to the 84 percent high of Very Good or Good in 1989, after a drop to 74 percent in 1996 and 76 percent in 1992. An impressive 87 percent considered SSV Medicine a valuable membership benefit.

Criticisms were generally about the timeliness and relevance of our articles. In the rapidly changing world of medical practice and medical economics, a bimonthly publication cannot be very timely. Our website and On Friday are better able to address that.

However, with help from our readers, perhaps we can better identify the most relevant issues and the best local spokespersons in follow-up.

Only 29 percent of the respondents reported that anyone else read their magazine. Since we often hear praise from office staff and spouses, physicians need to know that others are "peeking" at their SSV Medicine. The survey did not identify where respondents received their magazine, whether at home or at work. That might be relevant to how many and who else reads it. Since part of the magazine's mission is to bring us together, in all our individuality, we might want to encourage office staff, practice and teaching teams, and our families to come out of the closet about their reading habits.

About our respondents

Three-quarters of you, more than ever before in our surveys, would again choose to become physicians. However, those who would choose the same specialty dropped to three quarters from the 83 percent in 1992 and 84 percent in 1996. We do not know the respondents' present specialties or whither they would go. Nor how excluding the retirees and those who would not choose medicine again would affect specialty preference. We might explore this in future issues.

Despite a three to one preference for medicine and the same specialty, only 37 percent of our respondents were "very satisfied" with current practice, the lowest rate of satisfaction in 13 years. Only 1992 came close to that low.

How are 1992 and 2001 similar? Are doctors exaggerating their dissatisfaction with practice? Are they perennial complainers or, more serious, too afraid, pessimistic or tired to create satisfaction?

A whopping 82 percent of respondents thought a nursing shortage threatened the quality of medical care. Most recommended better working conditions, more recruitment and better training. Perhaps we can learn more about this.

National health insurance received the lowest favorable rating in the 13 years we have been asking about it. Over time the difference between government choice and patient choice in universal health care has become clearer, but the question uses the fuzziest language of 13 years ago. This too might warrant more study.

Perhaps our view of national health insurance is affected by how many of our respondents saw cost containment as a threat to the general quality of health care. In 1996 and now, 80 percent of our respondents saw cost containment as a threat to quality of care, a rise from 66 percent in 1989 and 71 percent in 1992. Does this reflect the rapid growth in how many physicians feel directly affected by cuts in services and payment as managers desperately try to avert financial failure?

On Friday and online got a quick look. The 71 percent who rated On Friday Very Good or Good is a bit less than in 1996, but not as low as in 1992, when it was 63 percent. Since On Friday is our best source of the brief, timely, practice-pertinent information our respondents want, we need to address this finding.

Our website should be our other source of prompt information, but over half told us they would not read SSV Medicine if it were published only online. Some suggested they would if reminded. How?

If the survey did not speak for you, let us know.

Ed_Rudin@macnexus.org

Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society
5380 Elvas Avenue #100 • Sacramento, CA 95819
916.452.2671 PH • 916.452.2690 FX • Email: info@ssvms.org

Copyright © 2000-2008 Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society - All Right's Reserved