



Communication Practices of Dentists and Staff: Opinions of Maryland Adults

Alice M. Horowitz, PhD, Dushanka V. Kleinman, DDS, MScD, Min Qi Wang, PhD

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Herschel S. Horowitz Center for Health Literacy

BACKGROUND

- Healthy People 2020 includes objectives that address patient-provider communications and its impact on health outcomes.
- With a growing interest in increasing oral health literacy, communication practices of dental care providers are especially important because most patients report they get their oral health information from dentists and their staff.
- Oral health literacy is important because it is associated with knowledge, use of preventive procedures, caries rates and failed appointments.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of Maryland English speaking adults with a child 6 years of age or younger about the manner in which their dentist and staff communicated with them at their most recent dental appointment. This survey was a 2-year follow-up survey using similar questions.

METHODS

We conducted a statewide phone survey of Maryland adults who had a child in the home 6 years of age or younger.

- Land phones were used with two sampling frames: a random digit dial sample and a low income sample.
- Five questions from the Agency for Health Research and Quality (AHRQ) Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems survey were used in the survey.
- In July 2012 a total of 802 surveys were completed with adults 18–65 years of age.
- The analysis included frequencies, percentages, chi-square tests, and multivariate logistic regression.

RESULTS

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents				
Characteristics	Random Sample		Low Income Sample	
	N	Percentage	N	Percentage
Education				
≤High School/GED	52	8.24	57	33.33
Some College or Trade School	128	20.29	56	32.75
4 Year College+	451	70.84	56	32.75
Marital Status				
Single	60	10.14	68	40.35
Married	567	89.86	102	59.65
Gender				
Female	432	68.46	124	72.51
Male	199	31.54	47	27.49
Race				
African American	87	13.79	60	35.09
Caucasian	480	76.07	92	53.80
All other	64	10.15	19	11.10
Age				
18-35 years	148	23.45	94	54.97
≥36 years	483	76.55	77	45.03
Type of Dental Insurance of Youngest Child				
Medicaid/SCHIP	40	7.14	42	27.10
Private	497	88.75	97	62.58
Other	8	1.43	12	7.74
Don't Know	15	2.68	4	2.58

- Overall, most respondents reported positively about the communication skills of their dental team.
- Those with higher levels of education and women were more likely to respond favorably.
- Respondents whose child was insured with Medicaid were less likely to respond favorably.
- Results were similar to the 2010 survey that used the same questions.

Five questions were asked about patient satisfaction with their dental provider.	
During your last dental appointment for you or your child:	
1. How often did the dentist or their staff listen carefully to you?	Would you say:
2. How often did the dentist or their staff explain things in a way you could understand?	Would you say:
3. How often did the dentist or their staff show respect for what you had to say?	Would you say:
4. How often did the dentist spend enough time with you?	Would you say:
5. How often did the dentist or a staff member treat you unfairly because of your race, ethnicity or level of education?	Would you say:
Responses were recorded based on this response scale:	
___ Never	
___ Sometimes	
___ Usually, or	
___ Always	
___ (VOL) Don't know	
___ (VOL) Don't remember	

DISCUSSION

- Medicaid recipients are frequently the patients with the greatest dental disease and in greatest need of prevention information and regimens for themselves and for their children.
- Providing these patients with accurate information in a manner in which they feel respected and listened to likely contributes to the patient's ability to understand and act upon this information.
- Communication practices of dentists and staff are important to increasing oral health literacy and potentially decreasing dental disparities.
- Despite special sampling, lower income respondents were far fewer suggesting that the results are better than they actually are.

CONCLUSION

Our results suggest dentists and their staff should consider improving their communication skills especially when working with low income patients.

REFERENCES

- Rozier RG, Horowitz AM, Podshun G. Use of communication techniques by dentists in the United States: Results of a National Survey. J Am Dent Assoc. 2011;142:518-530.
- Horowitz AM, Clovis JC, Kleinman DV, Wang MQ. Use of recommended communication techniques by Maryland dental hygienists. J Dent Hyg 2013; 4:181-1192.
- Maybury C, Horowitz AM, Wang MQ, Kleinman DV. Communication techniques used by Maryland dentists. J Am Dent Assoc, accepted 9/13.
- Horowitz AM, Kleinman DV, Wang MQ. What Maryland adults with young children know and do about preventing dental caries. Am J Public Health 2013;103:e69-e76.
- Horowitz AM, Wang MQ, Kleinman DV. Opinions of Maryland adults regarding communication practices of dentists and staff. J Health Comm 2012;17: 1204-1214.

Funded by:

