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# **Better Communications, Better Health: The Association Between Patient- Provider Relationships and Adherence**

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# Introduction

- **Adhering to provider medical advice and treatment can have a significant positive impact on patient health outcomes.**
- **Nonadherence to provider treatment plans increases both provider and patient frustration and can lead to unnecessary diagnosis and treatment, with costly implications.**
- **A growing body of evidence suggests that the quality of the patient-provider relationship and the nature of communications between them is significantly associated with whether a patient adheres to medical advice.**

# Objectives

- **To investigate whether there is a significant association between patient adherence to medical advice and treatment and aspects of the patient-provider relationship.**
- **To examine other factors, such as income, education level and language spoken, that may influence adherence.**

# Methods

- **This study uses data from the Commonwealth Fund 2006 Health Care Quality Survey, a random, national cross-sectional telephone survey of 3,535 non-institutionalized adults aged 18 and older living in the continental United States.**
- **We limit the analyses to 2,459 respondents who experienced a health care encounter with a regular doctor or at a usual place of care within the past two years.**
- **We define nonadherence as reporting “a time in the last two years when you didn’t follow the doctor’s advice or treatment plan, including getting a recommended test or seeing a referred doctor.” Reasons for nonadherence include: disagreement with the medical advice or because advice conflicted with personal beliefs; potential side effects; and cost.**
- **We measure patient-provider communications using a composite of nine survey questions; we measure the interpersonal relationship between a patient and provider using a composite of ten survey questions.**

# Demographic Characteristics and Adherence

- Respondents had a wide range of incomes; 33% earned over 400% of the federal poverty level (FPL), while 23% earned less than 200% of FPL.
- 54% of respondents continued their education beyond high school.
- The majority of respondents (56%) had employer-sponsored insurance coverage.
- 7% were uninsured at the time of the survey, and 12% reported being uninsured at any time in the past year.
- Nearly one in five respondents reported any nonadherence:
  - Disagreement with advice or against personal beliefs: 9%
  - Cost: 4%
  - Potential side effects: 7%

# Results: Patient-Provider Communications and Poverty, Education Levels

Table 1: Patient-Provider Communications by Poverty and Education (US Adults  $\geq 18$ )<sup>1</sup>

	Total	Poverty			Education				
		200% FPL+	Under 200% FPL	P Value	College Graduate	Some College	High School	Less Than High School	P Value
<b>Doctor-Patient Communications</b>									
How often does your doctor listen carefully to you? (% always)	78	79*	76	0.004	80*	76	78	74	<0.001
How often does your doctor explain things in a way you can understand? (% always)	80	80	77	0.110	81	74	84	72	0.380
Do you feel comfortable asking your doctor questions? (% yes)	98	98*	96	0.020	99*	98	99	92	<0.001
Have you ever left your doctor's office without getting important questions answered? (% no)	88	86	88	0.060	89*	81	90	87	0.010
How often does your doctor give you clear instructions so that you know what to do or what symptoms to watch for? (% always)	75	76*	69	0.004	74*	72	78	70	0.003
How often does your doctor make clear the specific goals and plan for your treatment? (% always)	72	69*	73	0.020	68*	67	73	65	<0.001
How often does your doctor tell you about treatment choices and ask for your ideas and opinions? (% always)	50	46*	52	<0.001	38*	49	50	56	<0.001
Has your doctor reviewed with you the medications you take, including those prescribed by other doctors? (% always)	82	82*	80	<0.001	83*	84	84	72	<0.001
Has your doctor explained the side effects of the medications you are taking? (% always)	79	80*	79	<0.001	78*	83	83	67	<0.001
<b>Communications Composite (% excellent communications)</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>0.810</b>	<b>29*</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>0.050</b>

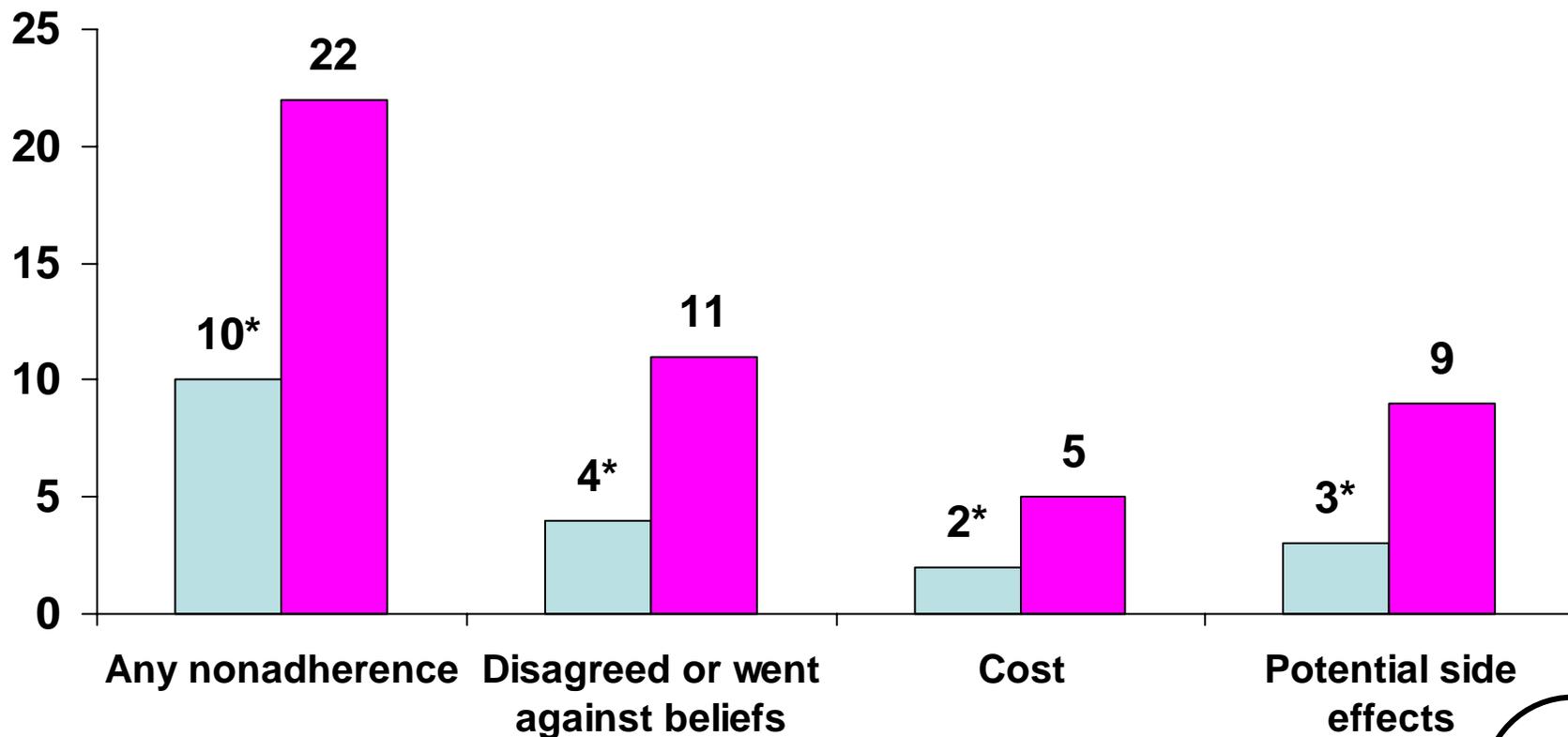
1. unadjusted, weighted percentages

Note: \*p<.05

# Results: Patient-Provider Communications and Adherence

Percent of US adults reporting nonadherence, 18 and older

■ Excellent Communications ■ Poor Communications



Source: Commonwealth Fund Quality of Care Survey, 2006

\*  $p < 0.05$



# Results: Excellent Patient-Provider Communications

- **Only 31% of the population reported excellent communications with their providers.**
- **Low-income adults were as likely as higher income adults to report excellent communications.**
- **Education matters: significant education subgroup differences existed when measuring reports of excellent communications.**
- **Adults who reported excellent patient-provider communications were significantly less likely to not adhere for any reason (10% compared to 22%.)**



# Results: Patient-Provider Relationship and Poverty Level, Insurance Continuity

Table 2: Patient-Provider Relationship by Poverty and Continuity of Insurance (US Adults  $\geq 18$ )<sup>1</sup>

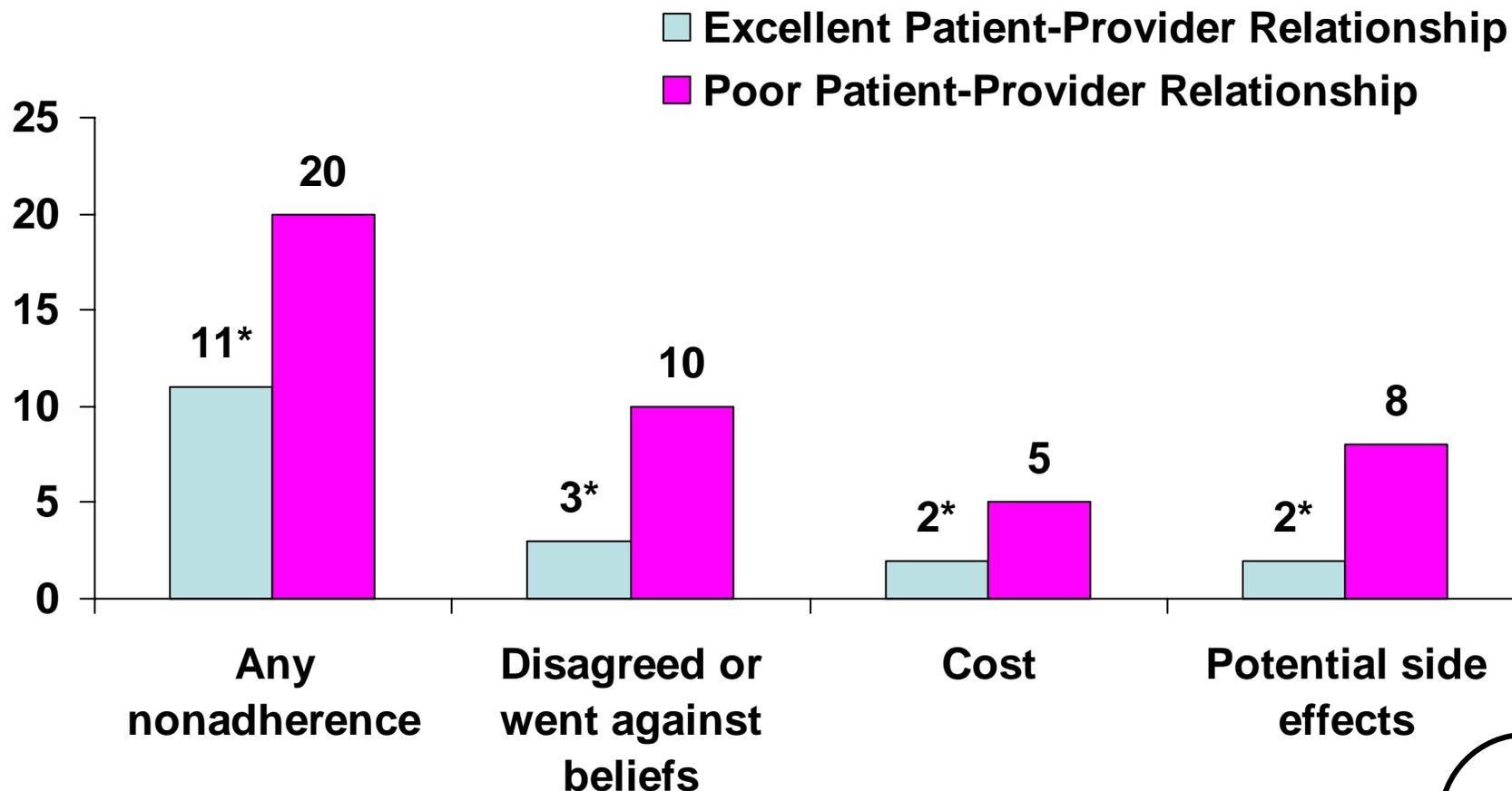
	Total	Poverty			Continuity of Insurance		
		200% FPL+	Under 200% FPL	P Value	Continuously Insured	Uninsured at Any Time	P Value
<b>Doctor-Patient Relationship</b>							
How often does your doctor spend enough time with you? (% always)	67	67*	64	<0.001	69*	50	0.004
Are you as involved as you want to be in decisions about your care and treatment? (% yes)	95	94*	89	0.010	94*	88	0.010
Do you agree with the following statement: "My doctor is extremely thorough and careful"? (% strongly agree)	74	75*	70	<0.001	75*	63	0.002
Do you agree with the following statement: "I completely trust my doctor's decisions about which medical treatments are best for me"? (% strongly agree)	64	61*	64	0.002	64	56	0.750
Have you ever felt that your doctor treated you unfairly or with disrespect because of your ability to pay for care or the type of health insurance you have? (% no)	93	95*	83	<0.001	94*	77	<0.001
Have you ever felt that your doctor treated you unfairly or with disrespect because of how well you speak English? (% no)	97	96*	95	0.030	97	89	0.230
Have you ever felt that your doctor treated you unfairly or with disrespect because of your race or ethnic background? (% no)	97	95*	95	0.040	96*	90	0.010
How often do you find the visits well organized and running on time? (% always)	36	35*	38	<0.001	37	30	0.090
How often do you receive the health care you need when you need it? (% always)	66	66*	63	0.001	69*	45	<0.001
To what extent would you recommend your doctor to your family and friends? (% definitely)	85	87*	82	0.030	85	86	0.340
<b>Relationship Composite (% excellent relationship)</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>18*</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>0.010</b>	<b>21*</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>0.040</b>

1. unadjusted, weighted percentages

Note: \* $p < .05$

# Results: Patient-Provider Relationship and Adherence

Percent of US adults reporting nonadherence, 18 and older



Source: Commonwealth Fund Quality of Care Survey, 2006

\*  $p < 0.05$

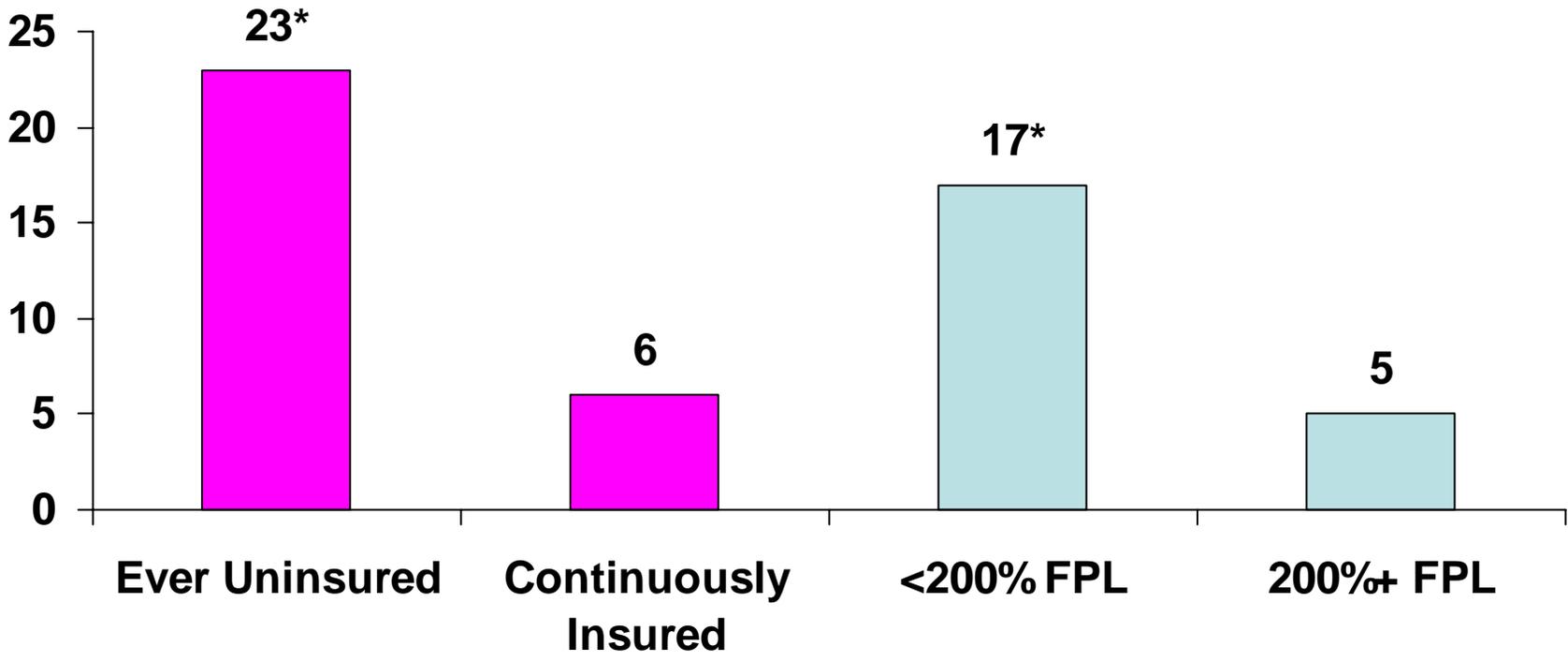


# Results: Excellent Interpersonal Relationship

- **Only 20% of adults reported having excellent relationships with their care providers.**
- **Those who were continuously insured were more likely to report having good relationships.**
- **Similarly to those reporting excellent communications, adults who reported having excellent patient-provider relationships were significantly more likely to adhere to medical advice or treatment (11% compared to 20%.)**

# Uninsured and Low Income Patients Are More Likely to Feel Disrespected by Providers

Percent of US adults, 18 and older, reporting having been treated unfairly or with disrespect due to ability to pay or type of insurance

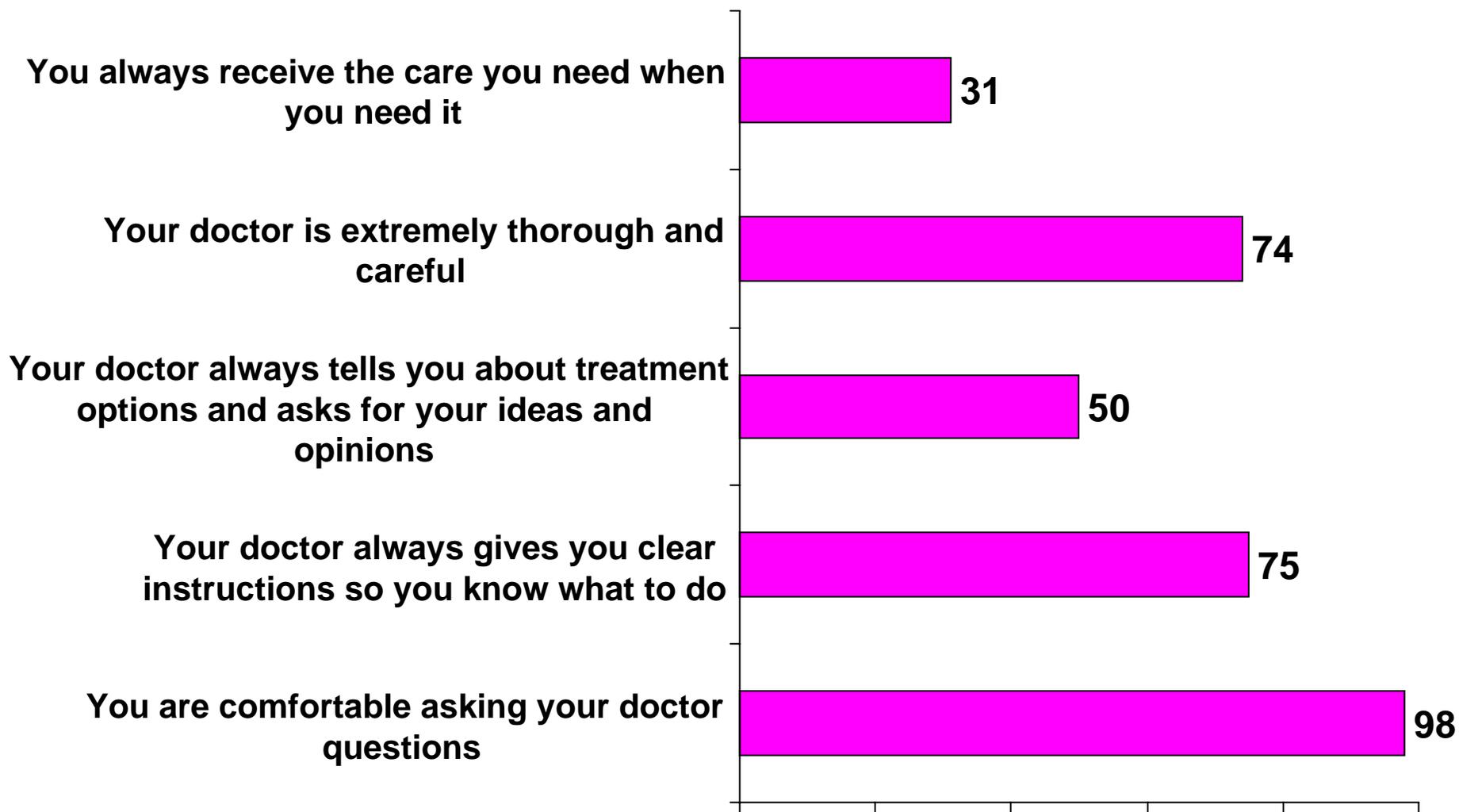


Source: Commonwealth Fund Quality of Care Survey, 2006

\* p < 0.05



# Responses on Selected Characteristics of an Excellent Patient-Provider Relationship



# Room for Improvement

- **Our results show that there is a substantial association between the patient-provider relationship and adherence to medical advice or treatment.**
- **Many demographic characteristics, including race, gender and poverty level, show no association with adherence.**
- **Those who have ever been uninsured or with incomes below 200% FPL are more likely to report having been treated unfairly or with disrespect due to their ability to pay or type of insurance than those with continuous insurance or incomes above 200% FPL.**

# Room for Improvement

- **Most respondents experienced some components of an excellent patient-provider relationship, but few felt they always received the care they needed when they needed it.**
- **Insurance matters most when it comes to nonadherence due to cost. The odds of nonadherence were twice as high among those who were uninsured at any time than among those with continuous insurance.**

# Conclusions

- **An excellent patient-provider relationship may be able to improve patient adherence to medical advice and treatment, which in turn may improve health outcomes.**
- **Providers have room to improve. Although most patients experience a few characteristics of an excellent patient-provider relationship, many other characteristics are often lacking:**
  - **Less than a quarter of respondents reported both excellent patient-provider communications and an excellent patient-provider relationship.**
  - **Respondents gave providers poor scores on giving straightforward instructions, providing clear goals and plans for treatment, and listening carefully.**

# Conclusions

- **Policymakers should consider ways to increase access to medical care and treatment for the uninsured, the group most likely to not adhere due to cost.**
- **Patient-provider communications may benefit from improved cultural competence and patient-centeredness through enhanced graduate medical education and faculty development interventions within these domains.**
- **Along with appropriate payment methods, the patient-centered medical home is a promising model of primary care that can improve the overall patient-provider relationship.**