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Doctors want more freedom to practice: new survey

A new survey of 1,000 doctors in four countries has revealed high levels of dissatisfaction with levels of freedom in deciding how to treat patients. The survey was conducted by *Medicine and Liberty*, an independent, non-partisan physician network, based in Switzerland.

The survey, conducted amongst surgeons and general practitioners in the US, Germany, Singapore and Switzerland, showed that 70% of doctors consider professional autonomy to be one of the most important elements of proper patient care, but 62% of German and 47% of US doctors are strongly dissatisfied with levels of freedom to choose the prescriptions, treatments and procedures that are best for patients. In the predominantly private insurance-based healthcare systems of Singapore and Switzerland, levels of dissatisfaction with treatment freedom are far lower (9% and 17%).

Only 35% of doctors across the four countries felt they were able to treat their patients as individuals rather than statistics.

Many doctors feel that government regulations unnecessarily hinder their treatment options. 52% of German doctors, 49% of US doctors and 38% of Swiss doctors are in favour of the complete abolition of government regulation of prescriptions of medicines or procedures—providing those medicines and procedures conform to established norms regarding safety and side effects.

Other doctor complaints centre around amount of time devoted to administrative details and paperwork (69%); handling of malpractice lawsuits in the courts (52%) and costs of malpractice insurance (51%); the amount of time and bureaucracy involved in government approval of new medicines and treatments (45%).

However, doctors in the US and Switzerland are far more satisfied with the overall quality of healthcare (64% and 75%) than their colleagues in Singapore and Germany (29% and 30%).

Dr Alphonse Crespo, director of Medicine & Liberty, and Swiss orthopaedic surgeon commented: “This survey should serve as a warning to governments who are seeking to centralise and mandate new healthcare regulations in the name of cost containment. US proposals such as a federal Comparative Effectiveness Research Agency, and German and Swiss



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plans to exert more government control over treatment guidelines, strike at the heart of physician autonomy. Ultimately, it will be patients who pay the price of such short-sighted policies.”

Notes for editors:

The study was commissioned by Swiss organisation Medicine and Liberty, and was conducted by the Consensus Group. A total of 1,000 doctors surgeon and general practitioners (65%) in the four countries were interviewed via an online questionnaire. The questions covered topics from how the role of doctors in society, the influence of insurance companies on the doctor-patient relationship to access to medical innovations. The interviews were carried out August and September 2010.

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