

A stylized world map in shades of yellow and orange, overlaid on a light blue grid representing latitude and longitude. The map is centered on the Atlantic Ocean.

**REPORT OF FINDINGS
A Cross-Country Comparative Study of
Physician Autonomy**

Conducted for
MedLib
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New York Düsseldorf Beijing

INTRODUCTION

Objectives:

- Document the views of physicians in selected countries on issues linked to health care environments that impact their mission
- Identify system specifics in surveyed countries that enhance or constrain the professional autonomy of physicians and influence their relationship with patients
- Promote a better understanding of the needs, expectations and perceptions of physicians on policy issues that influence provision of health care.
- Assess physician perceptions of possible limits to optimal medical service linked to system constraints in the studied models
- Serve as basis for later evaluation of the impact of US health reforms on professional autonomy and quality of care in the US
- Offer guidelines for advocacy of institutional designs that enhance doctor-guided and patient-centered quality medical care

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- **Online survey research among a sample of 1,000 physicians, distributed across four countries: US, Germany, Switzerland and Singapore**
- **Distributed 65% of interviews among primary care physicians and 35% among specialists**
- **Multivariate analyses to identify *key drivers* exerting maximum leverage on physician perceptions of the quality of care that existing health care systems in their countries allow them to provide**
- **Interviewing completed during the period August 16-September 15, 2010.**

EXECUTIVE DIGEST

- **In the four countries studied---U.S., Germany, Switzerland and Singapore---doctors tend to be more satisfied with the overall quality of the health care they provide to their patients, than with specific aspects of their medical practices.**
- **More doctors in Switzerland and the U.S. are satisfied with the quality of health care their patients receive [75% and 64% respectively] than in Germany or Singapore [30% and 29%].**
- **But fewer doctors across all four countries assign positive ratings to specific aspects of their practices [averaging only 15%-35%] vs. the average of 54% who assign positive ratings to the overall quality of care they provide.**

EXECUTIVE DIGEST

- **The dissatisfactions exerting maximum negative impact on doctors' overall attitudes toward their careers center around their *inability to treat patients as individuals, not as statistics; their incomes from their practices; lack of recognition and respect for the profession; competition for patients; and the lack of freedom to choose the therapies, medicines and procedures their patients need.***
- **Dissatisfaction with their lack of professional autonomy is more pronounced in Germany [62%] and the U.S. [47%] than among doctors in Singapore [9%] or Switzerland [17%].**
- **These criticisms notwithstanding, most [75%+] doctors across all of the countries studied---knowing what they know today--- would still select a career in medicine if they had to make that choice today; but the intensity of that commitment is less than what might be expected. Only 40% would “definitely” select a career in medicine today.**

EXECUTIVE DIGEST

- ***Professional autonomy*** resonates with doctors in all four countries [99%], including 70% who consider it a “very important” aspect of medical practice---particularly significant in view of the small proportion [38%] currently satisfied with their *freedom to choose the therapies, medicines and procedures they think are best for their patients.*
- Significant differences are observed in doctors’ preferences for variations in health care systems—with significant numbers in all countries favoring *universal health care* [51% in Singapore vs. 36% in Switzerland, U.S. [35%] and 29% in Germany]. *Third party fee-based* systems are preferred by 51% in the U.S. vs. 25% in Germany, 7% in Switzerland and 5% in Singapore. *Mandatory insurance* is the system of choice among 57% of doctors in Switzerland, 46% in Germany, 44% in Singapore, but only 14% among U.S. doctors.

EXECUTIVE DIGEST

- **Most doctors would like to see themselves identified as *family health care advisors and educators, promoting wellness and prevention of disease.***
- **In the U.S. and Singapore, doctors also lean toward positioning themselves as *prominent leaders and influential in their communities,* and as *participants in the national health care network.***
- **In Germany, however, doctors are also likely to describe themselves as *administrative participants in the German health care bureaucracy.***
- **Given the opportunity to design the *ideal* health care system for their country, doctors in most countries are more likely to support:**
 - ◆ **no government regulation of prescriptions for medicines or procedures approved in terms of safety and side effects**
 - ◆ ***mandatory wellness/preventive care programs***
 - ◆ ***health savings accounts***
 - ◆ ***incentives for medical school graduates to enter primary care practices***
 - ◆ ***special courts with appointed judges to handle malpractice issues***

Key Drivers

Factors Influencing Doctor Satisfaction

- Among doctors in the four countries studied, multivariate analyses indicate that the *key drivers* exerting maximum leverage on doctor perceptions of the quality of health care they provide to patients are:

Cumulative Index

- ◆ Ability to treat patients as individuals rather than as statistics 66
- ◆ Opportunity to practice preventive medicine 75
- ◆ Freedom to choose therapies, medicine and procedures that are best for patients 81
- ◆ Costs of malpractice lawsuits and insurance 88
- ◆ Amount of time you can spend with each patient 97

.....accounting for an estimated 35% of physician satisfaction with the quality of the health care their patients receive these day.

Key Drivers

Factors Influencing Doctor Satisfaction [continued]

- **Multivariate analyses of U.S. data indicates that same rank order of *leverage* issues---with emphasis on:**
 - ◆ **adequate time to treat patients as individuals**
 - ◆ **professional autonomy allowing doctors to choose the medications, procedures and treatments that are best for their patients**
 - ◆ **Preventive medicine**
 - ◆ **Costs of malpractice insurance and litigation**
- but with the addition of “patient access to information about their conditions and therapies from Internet and media sources” as a *key driver* of U.S. physician satisfaction with the quality of health care they provide to patients.

Key Drivers

Factors Influencing Doctor Satisfaction [continued]

- Although doctors in Germany are much less satisfied with the overall quality of health care they provide and most aspects of their practices, than in Switzerland---in both countries, doctors indicate a similar rank order of priority for issues influencing their satisfaction with the health care quality their patients receive:
 - ◆ adequate time to treat patients as individuals
 - ◆ professional autonomy allowing doctors the freedom to choose the medications, procedures and treatments that are best for their patients
 - ◆ ability to provide preventive medicine
- but with additional emphasis on:
 - ◆ the effect of “patient workloads and quotas imposed by insurers/providers/sick funds”
 - ◆ the “amount of time doctors must spend in administrative details and paperwork”
 - ◆ “fast and convenient access to accurate information about emerging health care issues and innovations”.

Key Drivers

Factors Influencing Doctor Satisfaction [continued]

- **Doctors in Singapore, who tend to be less satisfied with the quality of the health care they deliver, and most aspects of their practices, than in other countries--- are more likely to be influenced by “non-clinical” issues in explaining their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the quality of their practices:**

◆ Amount of time spend with each patient	54
◆ Their income from their practices	71
◆ Effectiveness of the professional associations	79
◆ Access to information about emerging health care issues and innovations	87
◆ Patient workloads imposed by health care providers and insurers	90
◆ Freedom to choose the medicines and procedures that are best for patients	92
◆ Timing and procedures for government to approve new medicines and procedures	96

...accounting for an estimated 49% of physician satisfaction with the quality of the health care their patients receive these day.