



LOOKING *for* ANSWERS

How consumers make health care
decisions in Massachusetts

A Survey of Massachusetts Adults

*Commissioned by
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts*



MASSACHUSETTS

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Presented at the *High-Performance
Health Care: What It Takes* Conference
Monday, April 2, 2007

Methodology

This survey was conducted by KRC Research. Interviews were conducted by telephone from March 5-12, 2007 among a randomly selected sample of 1,003 Massachusetts adults, ages 18 years or older. The estimated margin of error at a confidence level of 95% is +/-3.1 percentage points overall. The margin of error will be higher for results based on subsets of respondents. Sampling error is only one of many potential sources of error in this or any public opinion poll.



Summary of Findings

- »» Choosing the right doctor and hospital is one of the most important health care decisions people make, and Massachusetts adults face these decisions often. Approximately half make health care decisions for someone else in their family, and most have chosen a doctor or used a hospital within the last five years.
- »» Not surprisingly, consumers are eager for information to help them make more educated health care decisions, with more than three in four saying they would be interested in different types of information (e.g., hospital infection rates, information on the doctor's experience) to help them compare doctors and hospitals.
- »» Massachusetts consumers are hungry for this kind of information because they are keenly aware that problems with quality and safety exist. Nearly two in three believe medical errors happen often, and one in four have personal experience with medical errors.
- »» But the kinds of relevant information consumers seek, such as the kinds of information they use for other major purchasing decisions (like buying a car or appliance), are not currently available.
- »» In light of the dearth of credible information for making health care decisions, consumers often choose doctors and hospitals rapidly and with little information.

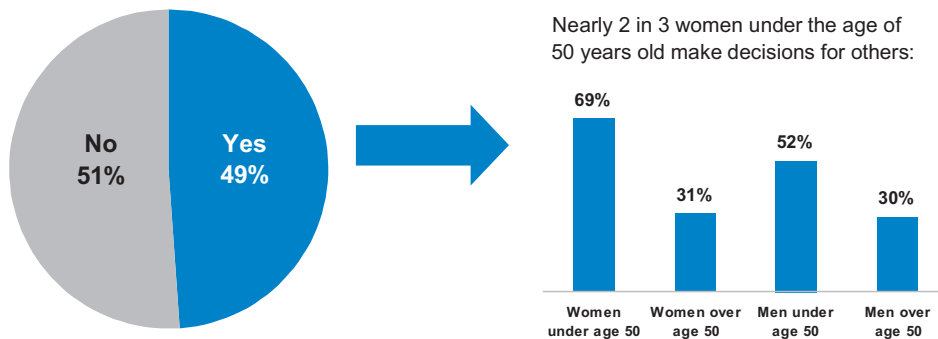


Detailed Findings

Choosing the right doctor and hospital is one of the most important health care decisions people make, and many face these decisions often.

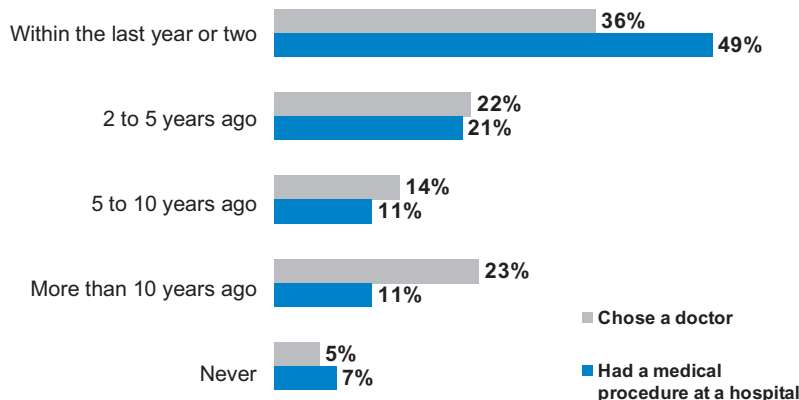
Half of all Massachusetts adults make medical decisions for someone else in their family (a child, spouse or parent). Middle-aged adults and women are most often in this position. Indeed, seven in ten Massachusetts women under the age of 50 are making medical decisions for others.

In addition to yourself, do you make medical decisions for anyone else, such as a child, parent or other dependent?



Medical decisions are not just decisions about treatments and medicines; they are decisions about providers. In fact, most Massachusetts adults have chosen a doctor or used a hospital within the last five years—70% of Massachusetts adults had a medical procedure at a hospital, for themselves or someone in their family, in the last five years; 58% chose a doctor, for themselves or someone in their family, within the same time period.

*When was the last time you chose a doctor, for yourself or someone in your family?
Had a medical procedure at a hospital, for yourself or someone in your family?*



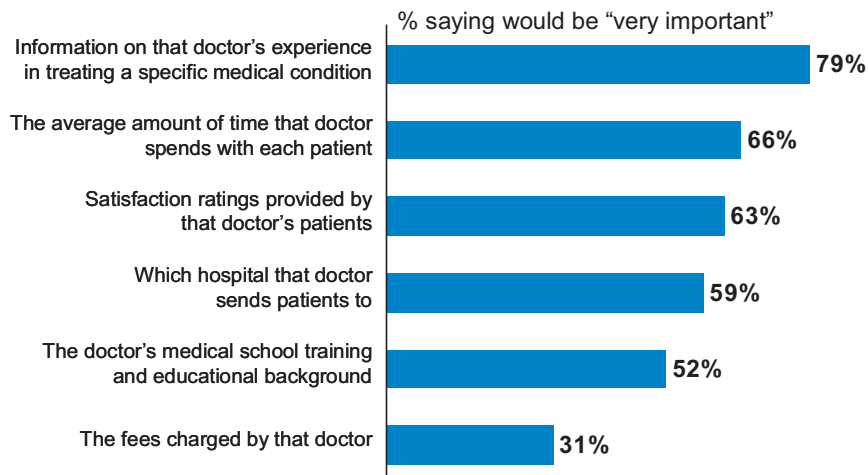


Not surprisingly, consumers are eager for information to help them make more educated choices among doctors and hospitals.

If quality data were available to help consumers choose a doctor, people would most want information on the doctors' experience. If quality data were available to help consumers choose a hospital, people would most want information on hospitals' infection rates.

Choosing a doctor. Fully 79% of Massachusetts adults say that information on a doctor's experience treating a specific medical condition would be very important in helping them make a choice. Information on patients' personal experiences with the doctor—as reflected in visit time and satisfaction ratings—rank next. Cost information is least interesting; only three in ten say that information on the fees charged by the doctor would be very important.

How important would that information be to you personally the next time you choose a doctor?



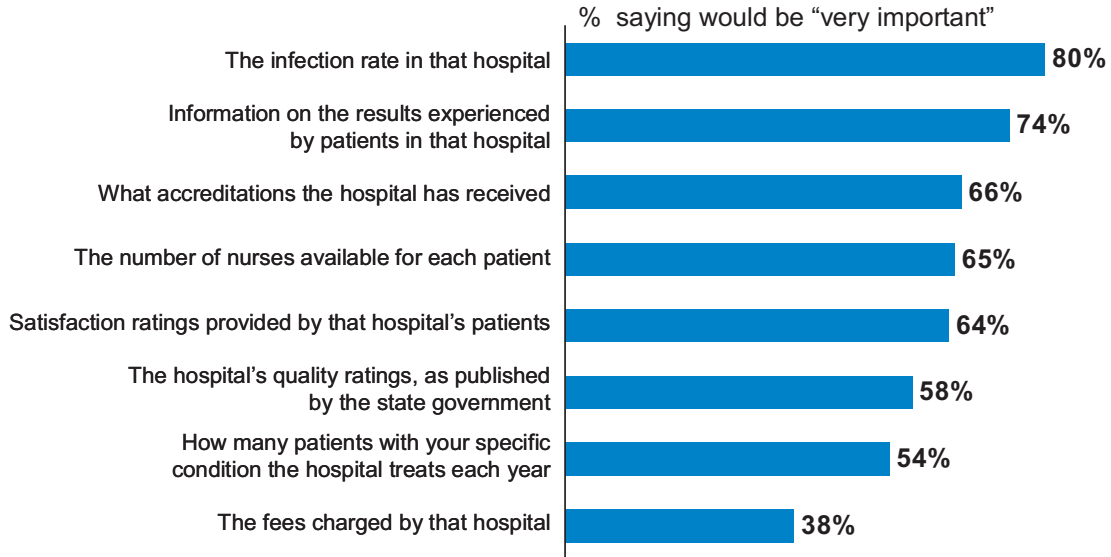
Choosing a hospital. Four in five Massachusetts adults (80%) say that having information on the hospital's infection rate would be very important to them the next time they choose a hospital. Information on the results experienced by patients of the hospital (for example, the complication rate) ranks next in importance, with three in four (74%) saying that would be very important.

While experience with a particular condition is the most important information in choosing doctors, consumers care less about this kind of expertise when choosing hospitals, with only slightly more than half (54%) saying it would be very important to know how many patients with a specific condition the hospital treats each year.

As with choosing doctors, information on costs falls to the bottom of the list, with only four in ten saying that information on the fees charged by the hospital would be very important.



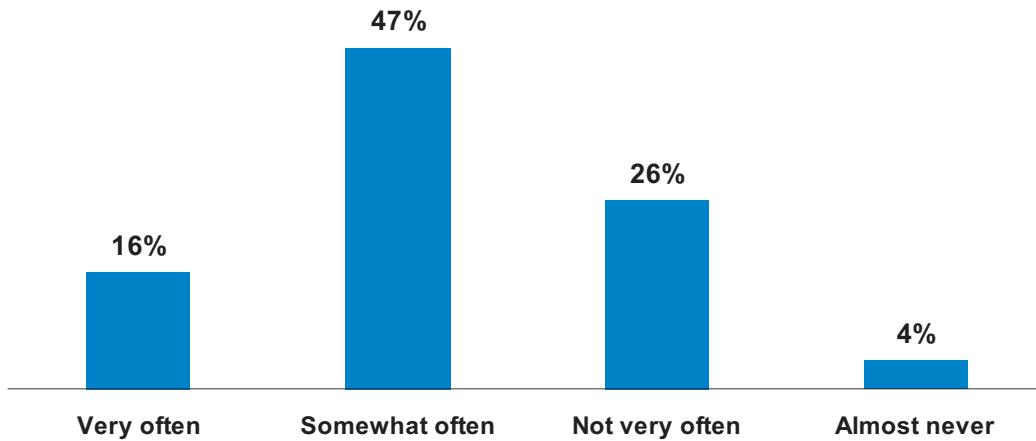
How important would that information be to you personally the next time you choose a hospital?



Massachusetts consumers are keenly aware that problems with quality and safety exist.

Nearly two in three Massachusetts adults (63%) believe medical errors happen often. Notably, women are significantly more likely than men to say that medical errors happen very or somewhat often (69% among women, compared to 55% among men).

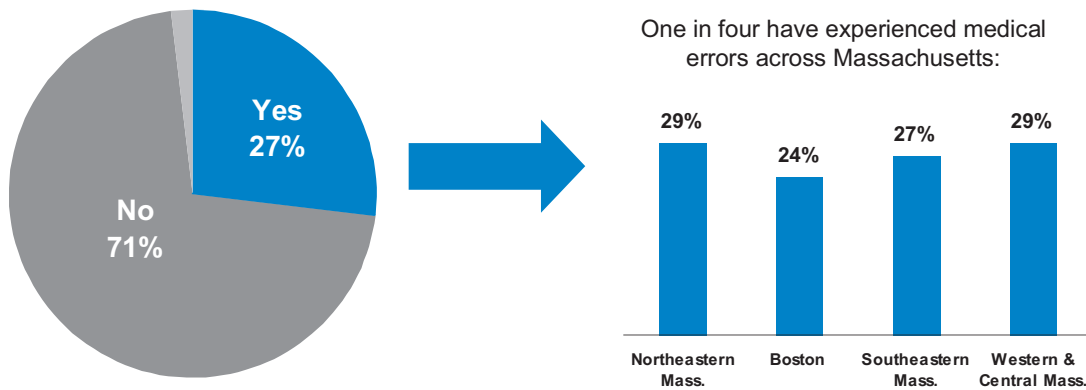
Would you say that medical errors made by doctors and hospitals in the United States happen very often, somewhat often, not very often or almost never?





Not only are Massachusetts consumers aware of medical errors, one in four (27%) report personal experience with medical errors. This is true across the state, with no significant difference by region. Across the board, those with a college degree are among the most likely to report such experience (33% among college graduates, compared to 24% among those with no college education).

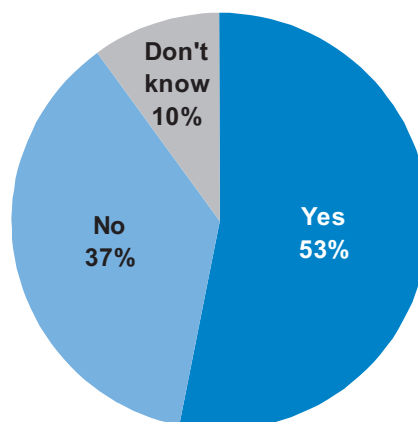
Have you yourself, or has someone in your immediate family, ever personally experienced a medical error during treatment at a hospital in the United States?



Despite consumers' interest in information to help them choose doctors and hospitals, such information is not available to them.

Only half (53%) believe that information comparing the quality, safety and effectiveness of different hospitals is available to the public.

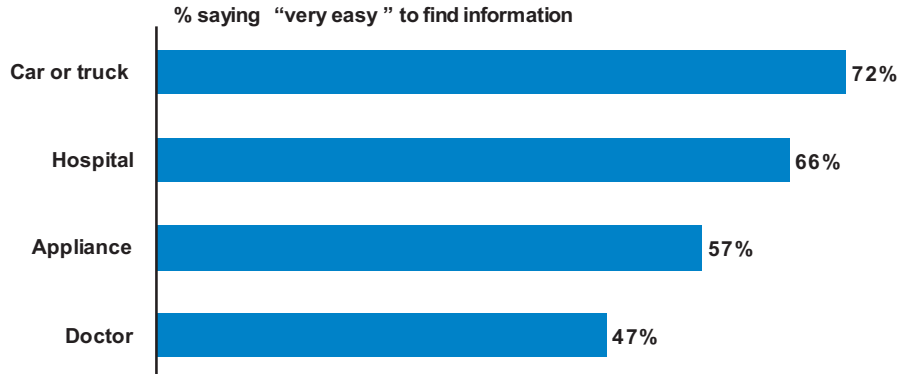
As far as you know, is information comparing the quality, safety and effectiveness of different hospitals available to average people like you, or not really?





Notably, consumers say that information on doctors is the most difficult to find. While most say that it is “very easy” to find information on choices for cars, hospitals and appliances, fewer than half (47%) say that it is very easy to find information on doctors.

And the last time you chose (___), how easy was it for you to find information about the choices you were considering?

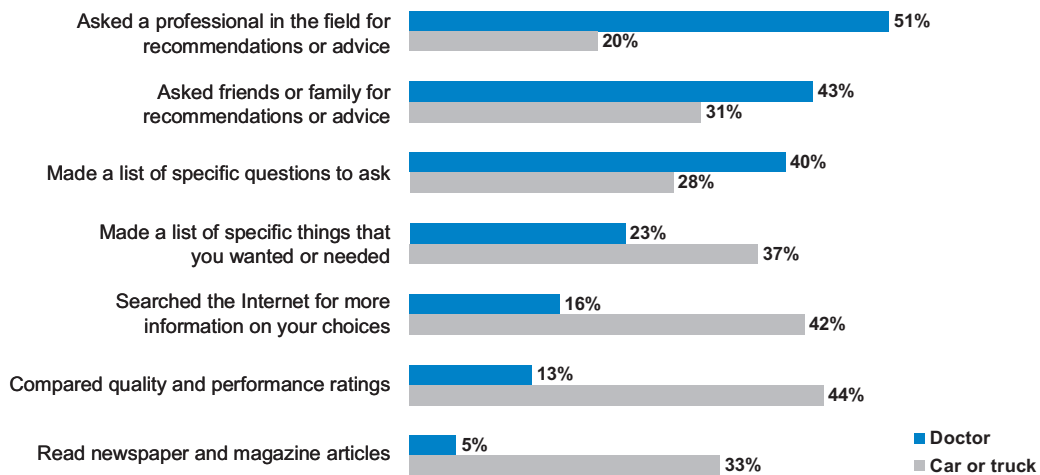


BASE: If chose or bought item in the last 10 years: hospital N=350; doctor N=729; car or truck N=482; appliance N=439.

In contrast, adults do turn to objective sources of information for other major consumer purchases.

To make other major purchase choices (such as cars and appliances), consumers compare quality and performance data, search the Internet for information, and make lists of what they want. In contrast, when choosing doctors and hospitals, people rely primarily on advice from others, and rarely turn to more objective sources of information. For example, the way consumers seek information about auto purchases could not be more different from the way they seek information to help them choose a doctor.

Thinking about the last time you chose a doctor... Bought a car or truck... Which of the following did you do to help choose?



BASE: If chose or bought item in the last 10 years: hospital N=350; doctor N=729; car or truck N=482; appliance N=439.



With hospitals, the only source of information used by a majority is advice from a professional—meaning, the doctor’s recommendation.

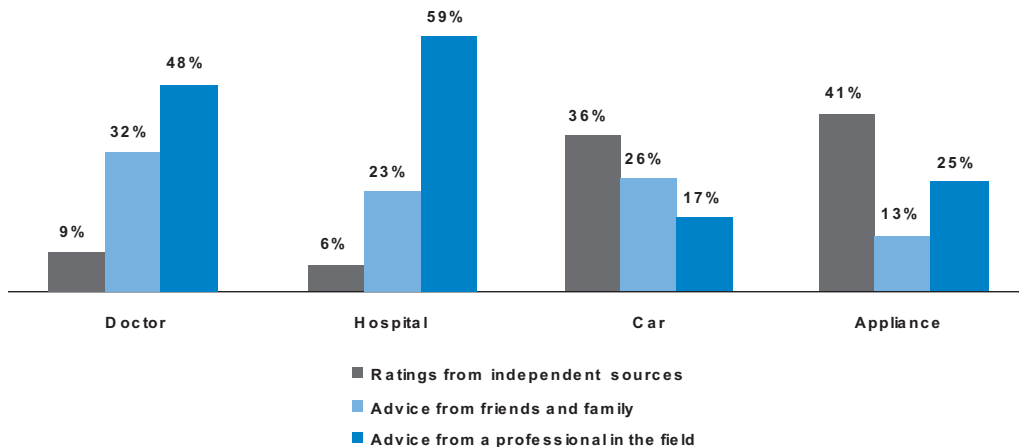
Thinking about the last time you (____), which of the following did you do to help you choose?

	Chose a Doctor	Chose a Hospital	Bought a Car or Truck	Bought a Major Appliance
Asked a professional in the field for recommendations or advice	51%	51%	20%	26%
Asked friends or family for recommendations or advice	43%	28%	31%	18%
Made a list of specific questions to ask	40%	27%	28%	28%
Made a list of specific things that you wanted or needed	23%	23%	37%	33%
Searched the Internet for more information	16%	11%	42%	35%
Compared quality and performance ratings	13%	17%	44%	48%
Read newspaper and magazine articles	5%	10%	33%	37%

BASE: If chose or bought item in the last 10 years: hospital N=350; doctor N=729; car or truck N=482; appliance N=439.

When asked to choose the kind of information that is most important, it becomes even clearer that few rely on ratings from independent sources when choosing a doctor or hospital, yet a plurality turn to independent ratings when purchasing a car or major appliance. For example, fewer than one in ten rely on ratings from independent sources when deciding on doctors (9%) or hospitals (6%), while approximately four in ten say that independent ratings were most important when purchasing a car (36%) or appliance (41%).

Overall, the last time you chose (____), which was MOST important to the choice you made?



BASE: If chose or bought item in the last 10 years: hospital N=350; doctor N=729; car or truck N=482; appliance N=439.

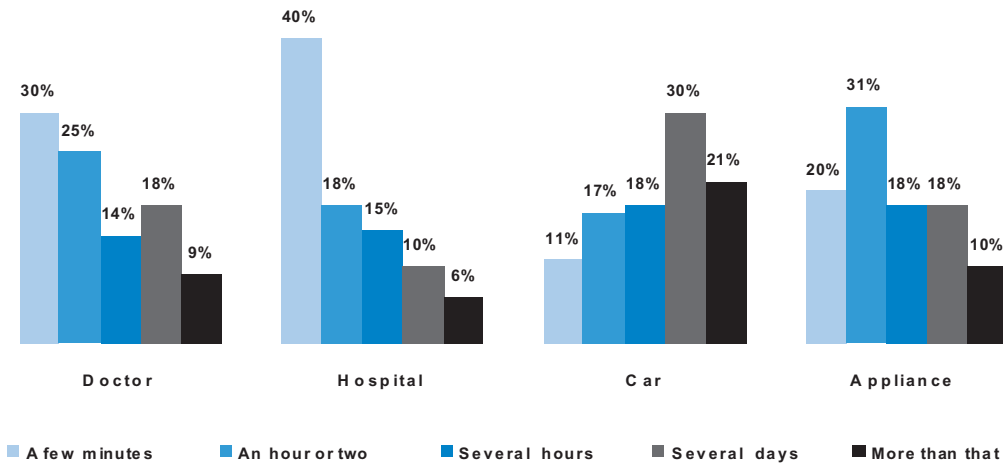


In light of the dearth of credible information for making health care decisions, it's not surprising that Massachusetts adults spend little time in choosing doctors and hospitals.

Indeed, most spent no more than an hour or two collecting information the last time they had to choose a doctor or hospital (compared to several hours or days spent in choosing a car), and nearly six in ten (58%) chose their last hospital in less than two hours, with 40% making their decision in a few minutes. Similarly, 55% chose their doctor in less than two hours, with 30% saying they only spent a few minutes deciding.

Those without post-secondary education spend the least time selecting their doctor. Sixty-two percent of those without a college degree say they spent no more than an hour or two deciding compared to 52% of college graduates.

And the last time you chose (___), about how much time did you spend collecting information to help you make your decision?



BASE: If chose or bought item in the last 10 years: hospital N=350; doctor N=729; car or truck N=482; appliance N=439.

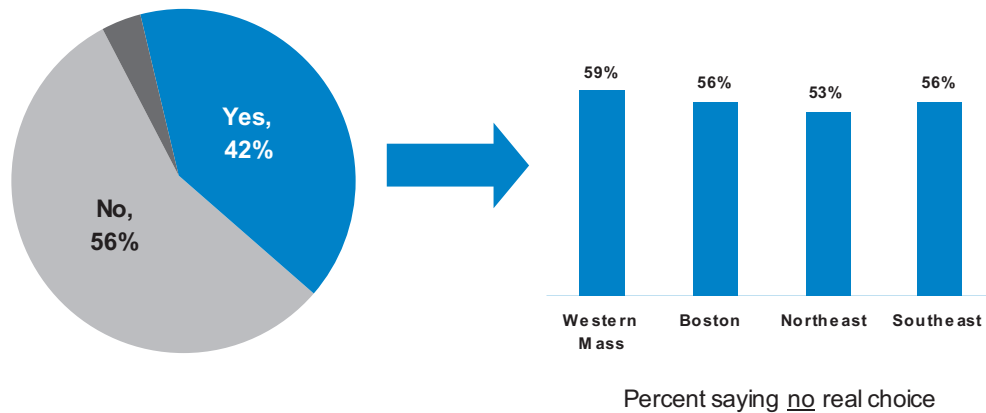


Additional Findings

Massachusetts consumers do not feel they have a choice in hospitals.

It is not surprising that people spend little time when choosing hospitals; most do not think they have a choice. Only four in ten (42%), across all regions of the state, felt they had a choice when considering a hospital for their last medical procedure.

Thinking about the last time you had a medical procedure in a hospital for yourself or for someone in your family, did you have a choice of hospitals, or not really?



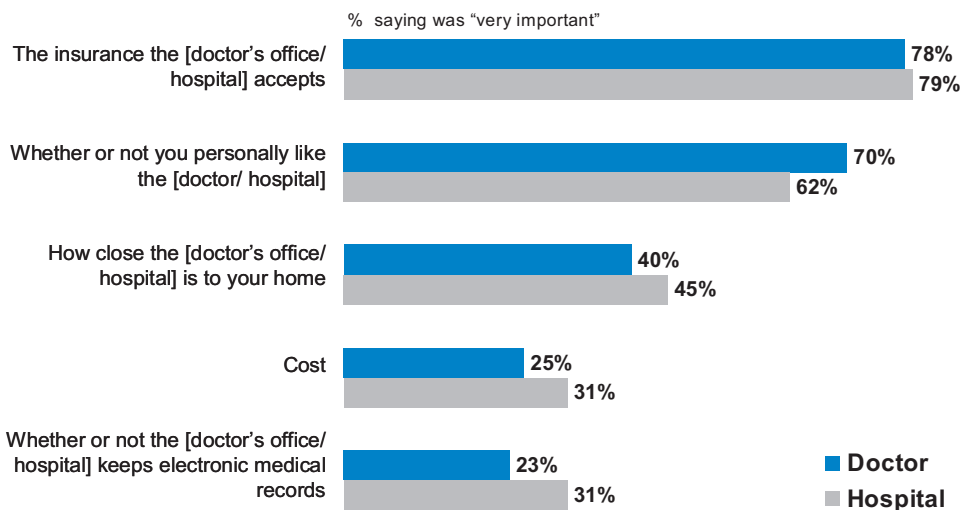
BASE: If chose or bought item in the last 10 years: hospital N=350



Insurance coverage and personal affinity matter most in choosing doctors and hospitals.

Given the limited choices and the limited information available to consumers, people rely primarily on three things in their selection: first, whether the doctor or hospital accepts their insurance; second, whether they personally like the doctor or hospital; and third, how close the doctor or hospital is to their home. Neither cost nor electronic medical records (a resource with a direct relationship to quality) matter nearly as much.

How important was that as a factor in your decision making process the last time you chose a (hospital/doctor)?



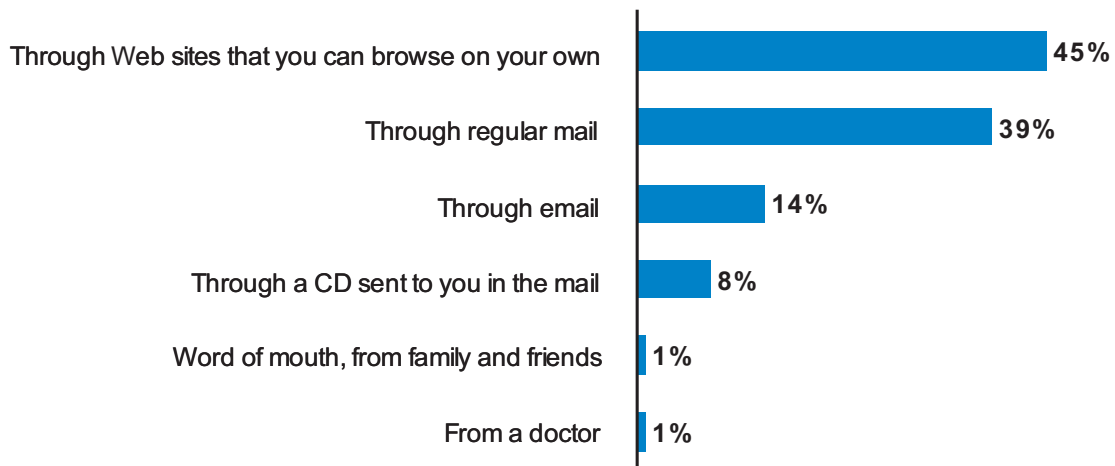
BASE: If chose or bought item in the last 10 years: hospital N=350; doctor N=729



The Internet is the preferred channel for information.

Although only 16% of Massachusetts adults went to the Internet for information the last time they chose a doctor, approximately half would like to be able to go to Web sites to find information that might help them choose doctors or hospitals.

How would you like to receive or access information that might help you choose doctors or hospitals? (Multiple responses allowed.)

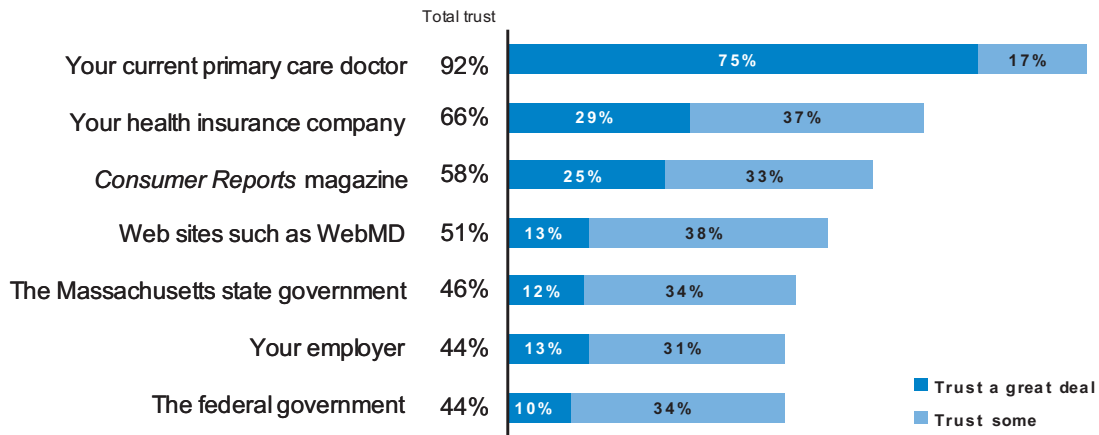




Doctors are the most trusted source of information in choosing doctors and hospitals.

More than nine in ten (92%) say they would trust their primary care doctors for information that might help them choose a doctor, while majorities would also trust their insurance company, Consumer Reports magazine, and Web sites such as WebMD. Government, employers and newspapers rank lower.

When it comes to information that might help you choose a doctor or hospitals, how much would you trust information from each of the following sources?





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