
Highlights and Chartpack



The Kaiser Family Foundation

National Survey of Physicians

Part III: Doctors' Opinions about their Profession

March 2002

Methodology

The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation *National Survey of Physicians*, conducted by mail from March 26 through October 11, 2001, is based on a nationally representative random sample of 2,608 physicians whose major professional activity is direct patient care. The sample frame was developed from two sources, the American Medical Association's Physician Masterfile and a related file developed by the Association of American Medical Colleges that included additional information on the race and ethnicity of physicians. These two files are linked by a common identifier and were merged for the purposes of selecting this sample. African American, Latino, and Asian physicians were oversampled to increase the number of responses from these physicians. Results were then weighted by race and other factors to reflect the actual distribution of physicians in the nation. Foundation staff designed and analyzed the survey, and fieldwork was conducted by the Research Triangle Institute. The margin of sampling error is +/-3 percent, for results based on subsets of respondents the margin of error is higher. Note that in addition to sampling error there are other possible sources of measurement error, though every effort was undertaken to minimize these other known sources.

Data from 1981 on physician satisfaction with their profession is from the Kaiser Family Foundation *Medical Practice in the 1980s* survey. Fieldwork for the survey was conducted by Louis Harris and Associates in-person in physicians' offices from July 13 to October 6, 1981 with a national random sample of 1,426 physicians. The margin of sampling error for this survey is +/-3 percentage points.

Data from 1999 on physician opinion about managed care is from the Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health *Survey of Physicians and Nurses*. The survey was conducted from by mail from February 11 to June 5, 1999 with a national random sample of 1,053 physicians and 768 nurses. Staff from the Foundation and the Harvard School of Public Health jointly designed and analyzed the survey, and fieldwork was conducted by the National Opinion Research Center. The margin of sampling error for the 1,053 physicians is +/-3 percentage points.

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Doctors' Opinions about Their Profession

Doctors say that their morale and their colleagues' morale has gone down in recent years, though doctors today are just about as likely as they were in 1981 to recommend medicine as a profession. Among the almost half of doctors who would not recommend the profession today, administrative hassles and loss of autonomy are cited as the main reasons for dissatisfaction, followed by excessive professional demands, less respect for the medical profession, and inadequate financial rewards.

The majority of physicians say managed care has negatively affected the medical profession in a variety of areas, including increasing paperwork required, decreasing time with patients, and decreasing patients' access to specialists. Doctors' attitudes about managed care have become somewhat more negative since 1999. However, those doctors who work primarily in managed care environments tend to have somewhat more positive views about the effect of managed care on the profession.

Doctors agree with the public that there are a variety of health care policy priorities that are important for Congress to address.

I. General Opinions about the Profession

The majority of physicians say both their colleagues' and their own morale have waned in recent years. Most physicians (87%) say that the overall morale of physicians has decreased in the last five years. Fewer (58%), though still a majority, say that their own enthusiasm for practicing medicine has lessened over the same time period. (Chart 1)

A majority (53%) of doctors say they would recommend the practice of medicine to a young person today – but 45% say they would not. When those doctors who would not recommend the profession were given a list of possible reasons why, the most frequently cited reasons are paperwork and administrative hassles (57%) and loss of autonomy (46%). About three in 10 pick excessive professional demands (31%), less respect for the medical profession (31%), and inadequate financial rewards (31%). Fewer say difficulties in starting or operating a practice (22%), the educational process being too long, difficult, or expensive (16%), and the profession not being personally satisfying (15%) are the main reasons for their dissatisfaction. (Chart 2)

Doctors' willingness to recommend medicine as a profession has changed little since the early 1980s. A Kaiser Family Foundation study conducted in 1981 asked physicians whether they would recommend the practice of medicine as a profession today as highly as they would have ten years ago. Fifty percent of physicians said they would recommend the practice as highly, and 48% said they would not. Given the similarity of these findings to 2001 data, physician attitudes appear to have changed little since the early 1980s. (Chart 3)

Most doctors are satisfied with the continuity of care, professional challenges, and current income provided by their practices. However, they are less satisfied with the amount of time they have with patients or for nonprofessional interests, their autonomy, and their potential income. (Chart 4)

- The majority of doctors say that they are satisfied with the continuity of their relationships with their patients (84%), the professional challenges of their practices (79%), and their current income (57%).
- On the other hand, the majority of physicians say they are dissatisfied with: the amount of work hours spent on administrative activities compared with patient care (74% say “dissatisfied”); the time the profession allows them to devote to nonprofessional interests and family and friends (56%); having enough professional autonomy in the clinical decisions they make for patients (54%); and their potential income over the next five years (53%).

II. The Influence of Managed Care on the Profession

About three-quarters of physicians say managed care has had a negative impact on the way they practice medicine (76%) and on the medical care services available to their patients (75%). (Chart 5)

Asked more specifically about the effect of managed care on physicians’ practices and on patient care over the past five years, physicians again tend to feel negative about the role managed care has played. (Charts 6 and 7)

- In many areas, the majority of doctors feel negative about the effect of managed care. Asked whether managed care has increased, decreased, or had no effect on health care in different areas, the majority of doctors say that managed care has increased the amount of paperwork required (95%), decreased the amount of time they can spend with their patients (88%), decreased the ability of patients to see specialists (83%), increased overhead costs for physicians’ practices (83%), decreased the ability of patients to get needed prescription drugs (78%), and decreased health care quality (73%).
- Doctors tend to believe that managed care has increased overall health care costs (41%) rather than decreased costs (23%), while 34% say it has had no effect on costs.
- Doctors also tend to say that managed care has not been effective in reducing use of inappropriate services (44% say “no effect” on use of inappropriate services; 29% say managed care has successfully decreased use of inappropriate services, but 26% have the opposite view, saying that managed care has actually increased the amount of inappropriate services).

However, many doctors do credit managed care for some improvements in care. (Chart 8)

- Over six in 10 doctors (63%) say that managed care has increased the use of practice guidelines and disease management protocols, and doctors tend to say that managed care has increased the likelihood that patients will get preventive services (42% express this view; 31% say it has had no effect and 26% say it has decreased use of preventive services).

Doctors' attitudes toward managed care have become somewhat more negative since 1999.

- In 2001, doctors are more likely than they were in 1999 to say that managed care has had a “mostly negative” impact on the way they practice medicine (41% vs. 25%) and the medical services available to their patients (36% vs. 24%).
- Doctors are slightly more likely in 2001 than in 1999 to say that managed care has decreased the amount of time that doctors spend with their patients (88% vs. 83%), decreased the likelihood that patients will get preventive services (26% vs. 21%), had no effect on the amount of inappropriate health care services (44% vs. 39%), and increased overall health care costs (41% vs. 32%). Doctors are slightly less likely in 2001 than in 1999 to say that managed care has increased the use of practice guidelines and disease management protocols (63% vs. 68%).

Doctors primarily affiliated with a single managed care organization tend to be somewhat more positive about the effect of managed care than other doctors.

- Doctors primarily affiliated with a single managed care plan are much less likely than other doctors to say that managed care has increased overhead costs for physicians' practices (60% vs. 87% -- a 27 percentage point gap). They are also less likely than other doctors to say managed care has decreased the quality of care for patients (63% vs. 75% -- a 12 point gap), increased paperwork (86% vs. 96% -- a 10 point gap), decreased the ability of patients to see specialists (76% vs. 84% -- an 8 point gap), and decreased the ability of patients to get prescription drugs (69% vs. 80% -- an 11 point gap).
- Doctors affiliated with a single managed care plan are more likely than other doctors to say that managed care has decreased the use of inappropriate services (40% vs. 27% -- a 13 point gap), decreased health care costs (32% vs. 22% -- a 10 point gap), and increased the use of practice guidelines (70% vs. 62% -- an 8 point gap).

III. Health Policy Priorities

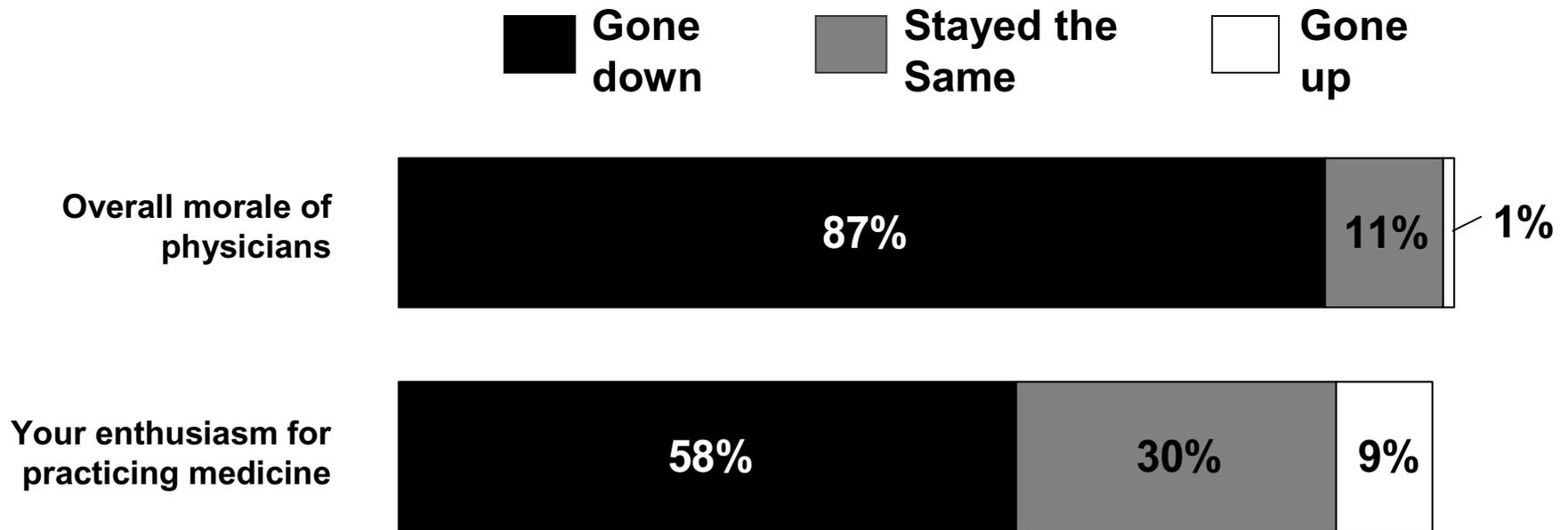
When doctors are presented with several health policy priorities that Congress could address, like the general public, a majority say it is “very important” for Congress to address a variety of issues. Doctors' top priorities include making Medicare financially sound for future generations (59%), increasing the number of Americans with health insurance (57%), and protecting patients' rights in health plans (55%). (Chart 9)

- Furthermore, around half (49%) say helping seniors pay for medications is “very important.” A third say that the following issues are “very important”: helping families with the costs of caring for elderly or disabled family members; regulating the costs of medicines; and encouraging medical savings accounts.

Chart 1

Physician Morale

In the last 5 years, has each of the following gone up, gone down, or stayed about the same...



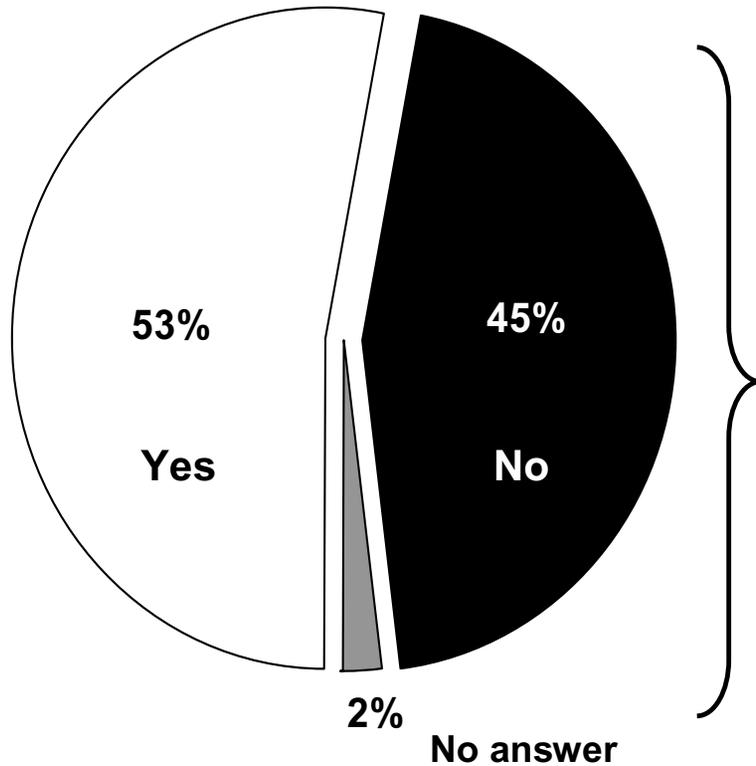
Note: "No answer" not shown

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, *National Survey of Physicians*, March 2002 (conducted March-October 2001)

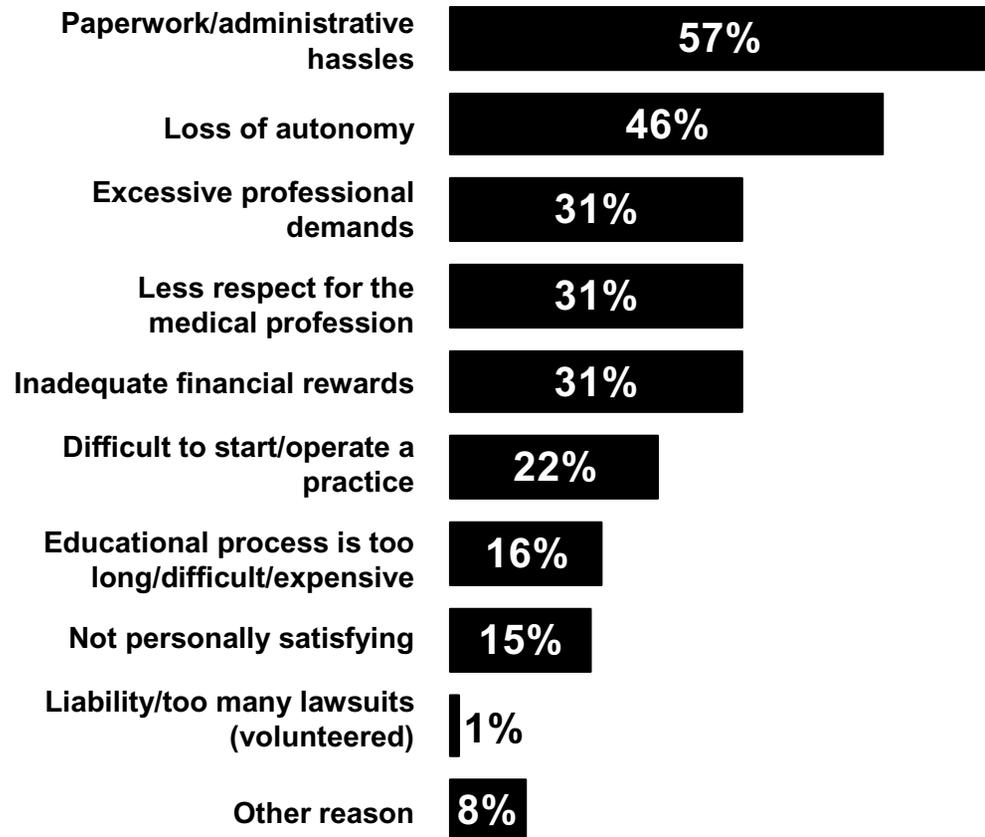
Chart 2

Doctors' Attitudes about their Profession

Would you recommend the practice of medicine as a profession today?



Asked of the 45% of physicians who responded “no”—
What is the main reason you would not recommend the practice of medicine? (multiple answers accepted)

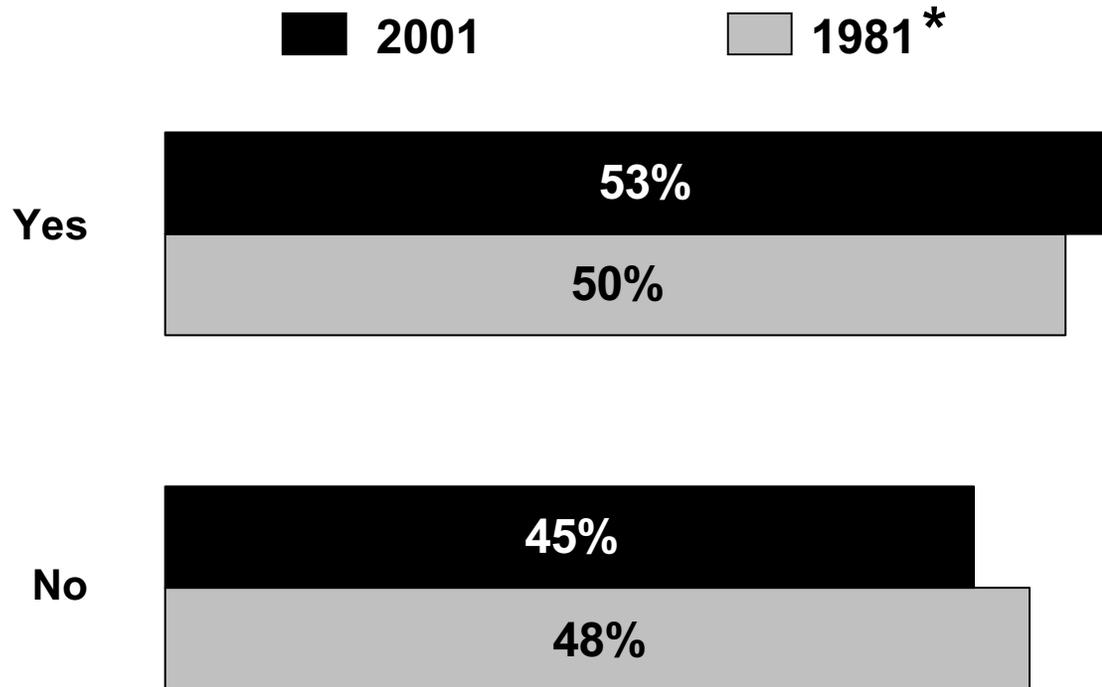


Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, *National Survey of Physicians*, March 2002 (conducted March-October 2001)

Chart 3

Doctors' Willingness to Recommend Medicine as a Profession

Would you recommend the practice of medicine as a profession to a young person today?



* The 1981 survey asked, "Would you recommend the practice of medicine as a profession to a young person today as highly as you might have recommended it ten years ago, or not?"

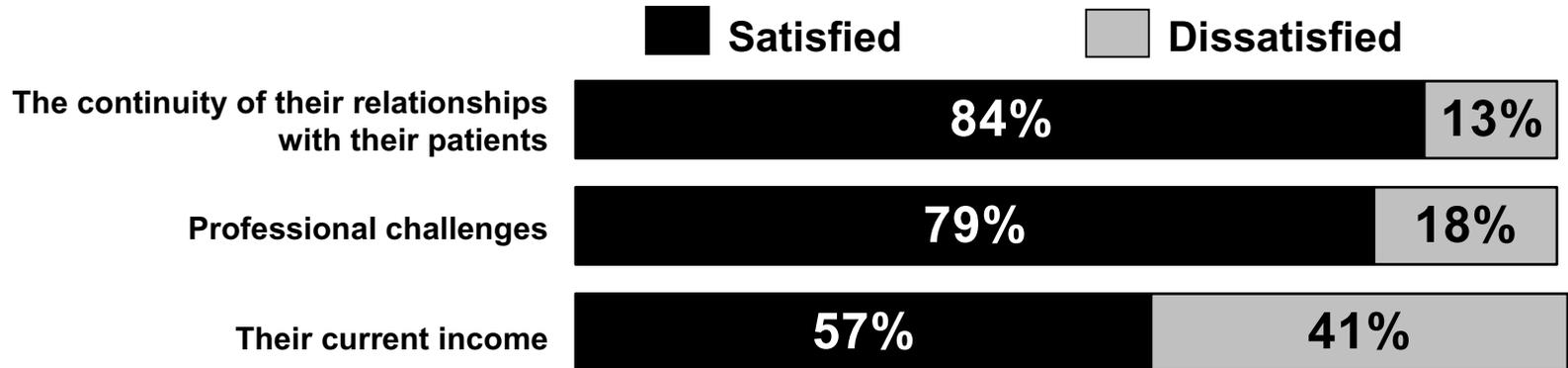
Note: "No answer" / "Not Applicable" Not Shown

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, *National Survey of Physicians*, March 2002 (conducted March-October 2001); Kaiser Family Foundation, *Medical Practice in the 1980s* survey, July 1982 (conducted July 13-October 6 1981)

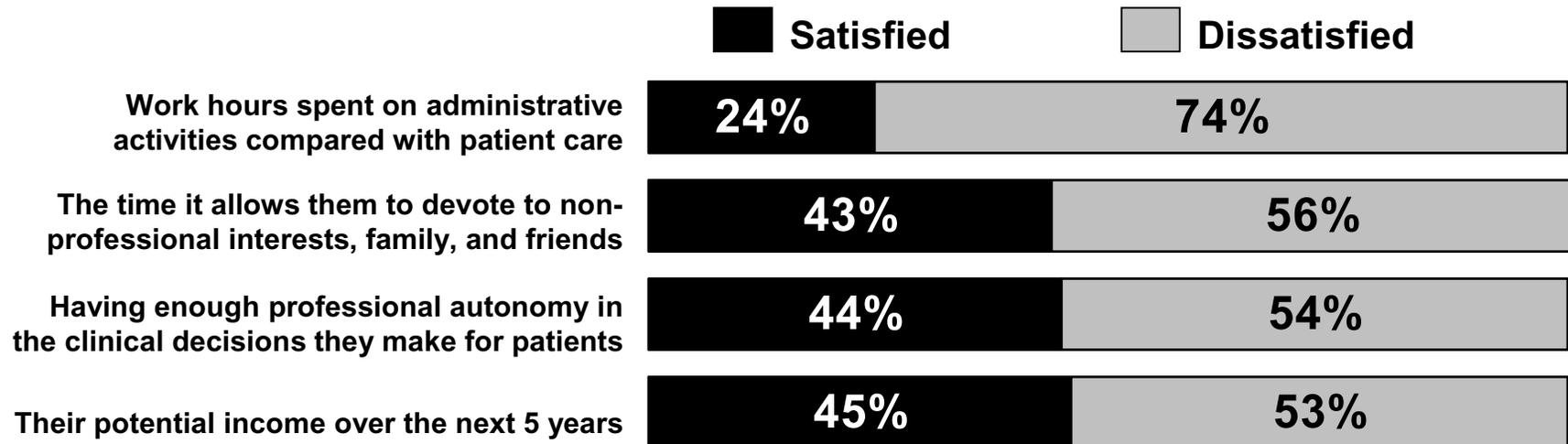
Chart 4

Doctors' Satisfaction with their Practices

The majority of physicians are satisfied with ...



The majority of physicians are dissatisfied with...



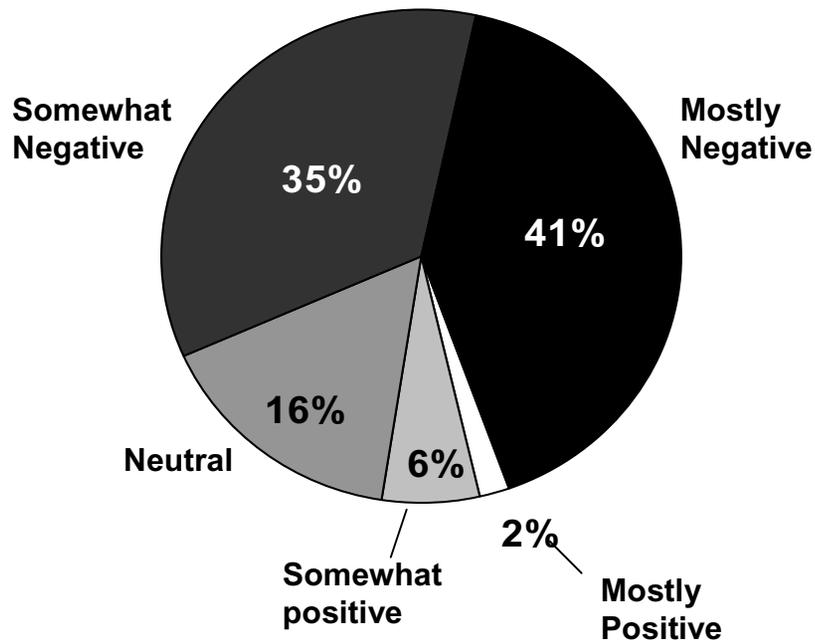
Note: "No answer" not shown

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, *National Survey of Physicians*, March 2002 (conducted March-October 2001)

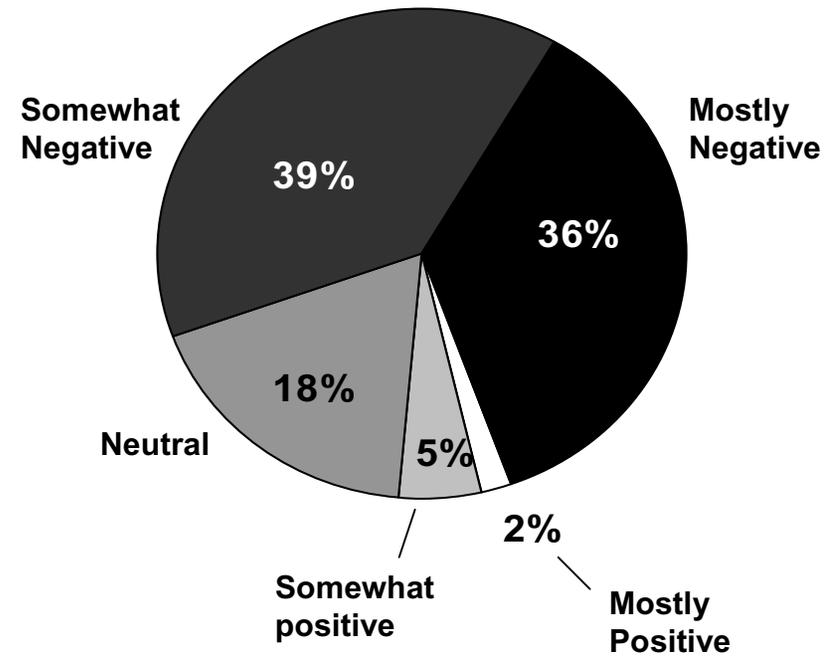
Doctors' Views on the Overall Effects of Managed Care

Overall, do you think managed care has had a mostly positive, somewhat positive, neutral, somewhat negative, or mostly negative impact on...

The way you practice medicine?



The medical care services available to your patients?

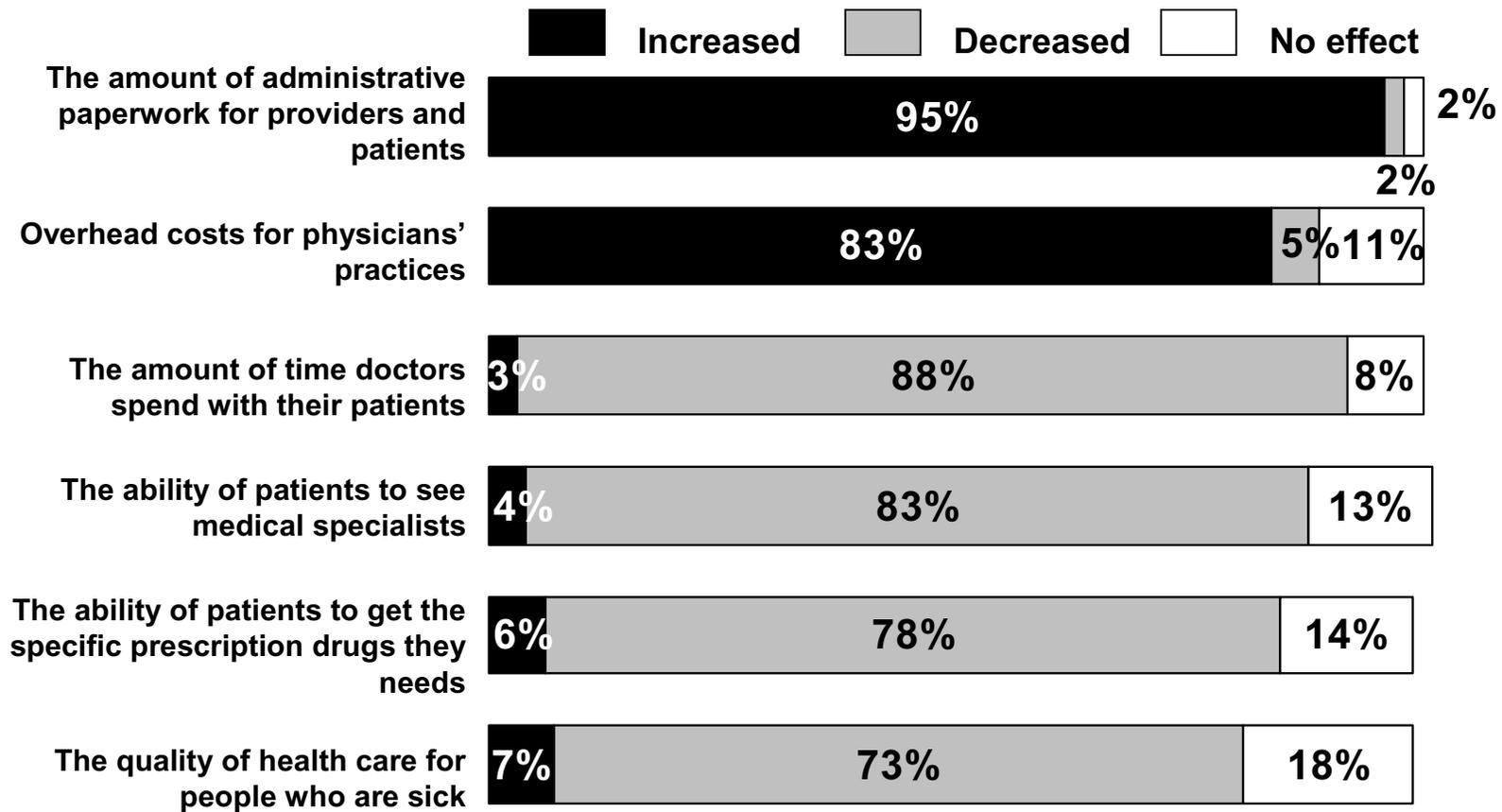


Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, *National Survey of Physicians*, March 2002 (conducted March-October 2001)

Chart 6

In Many Areas, the Majority of Doctors Tend to Feel Negatively about the Effect of Managed Care Plans...

During the last 5 years, do you think HMOs and other managed care plans have increased, decreased, or had no effect on...



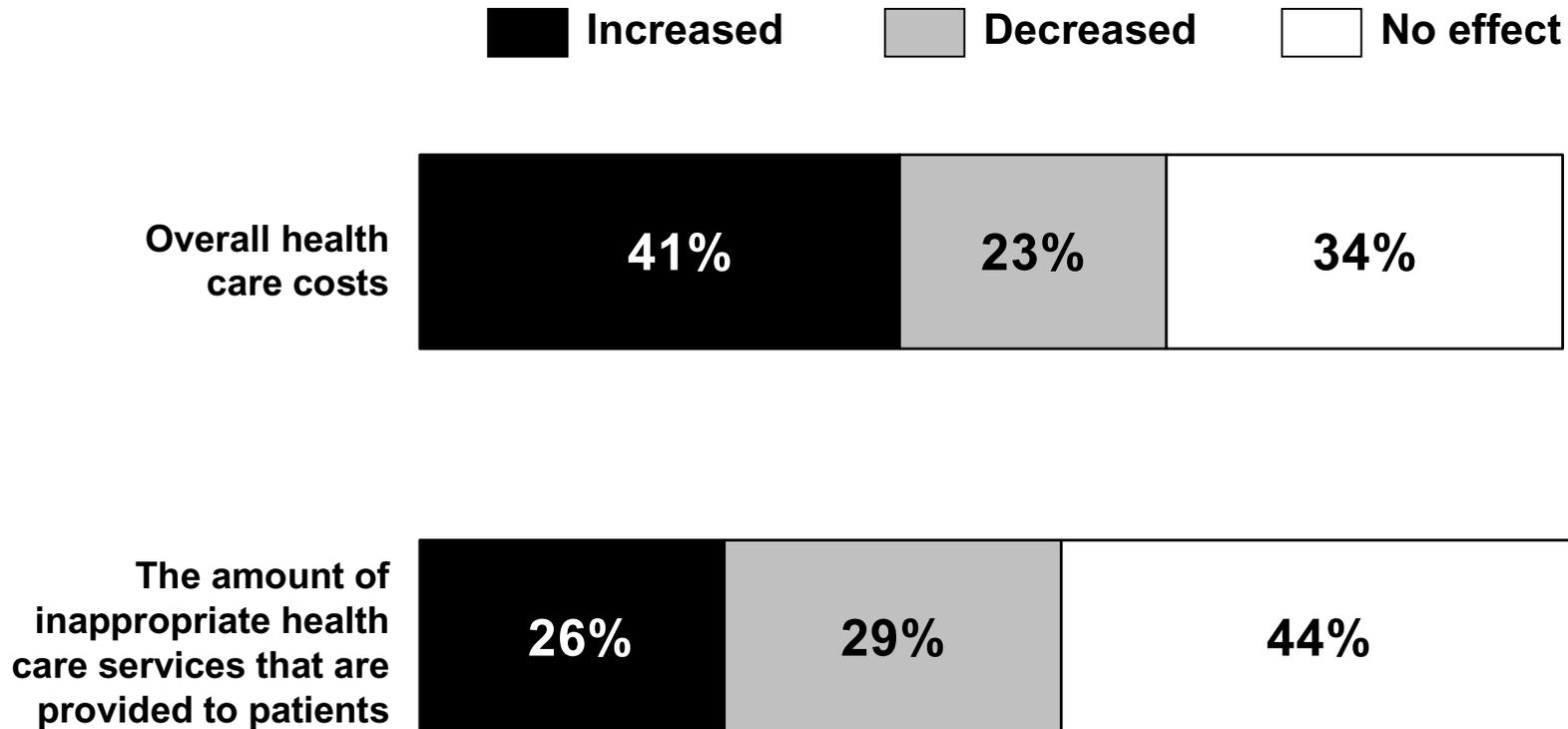
Note: "No answer" not shown

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, *National Survey of Physicians*, March 2002 (conducted March-October 2001)

Chart 7

Doctors Tend to See Fewer Impacts on Costs and Improving Health Care Services

During the last 5 years, do you think HMOs and other managed care plans have increased, decreased, or had no effect on...



Note: "No answer" not shown

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, *National Survey of Physicians*, March 2002 (conducted March-October 2001)

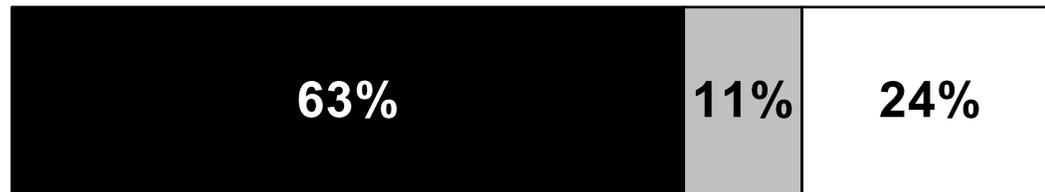
Chart 8

Doctors are More Positive about the Effect of Managed Care Plans in Two Areas ...

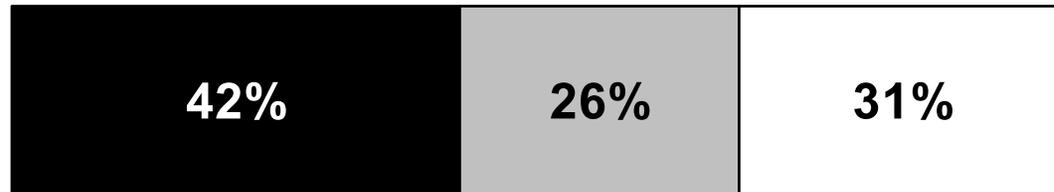
During the last 5 years, do you think HMOs and other managed care plans have increased, decreased or had no effect on...

■ Increased ■ Decreased □ No effect

The use of practice guidelines and disease management protocols in patient care



The likelihood that patients will get preventive services such as immunizations, health screenings, and physical exams



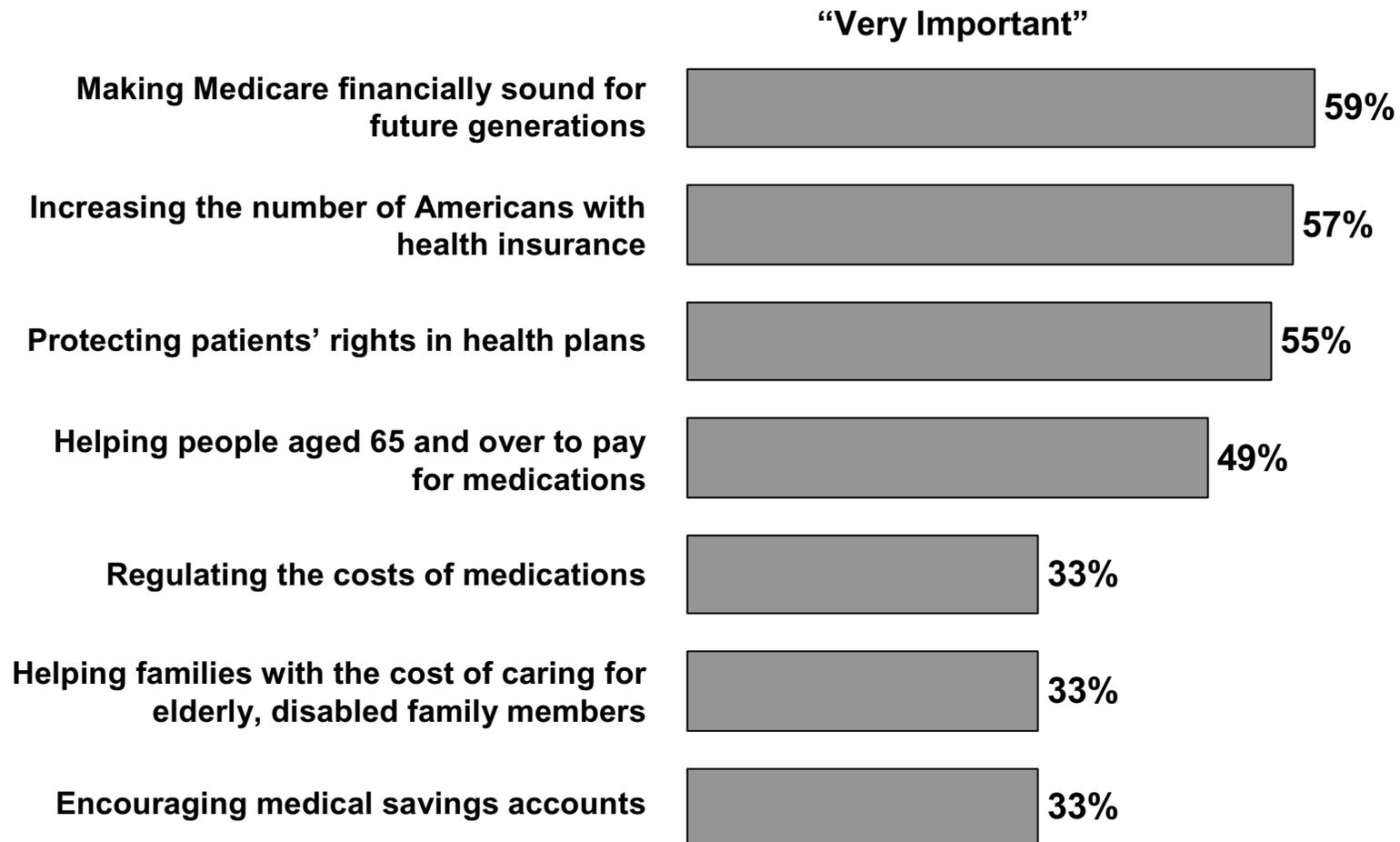
Note: "No answer" not shown

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, *National Survey of Physicians*, March 2002 (conducted March-October 2001)

Chart 9

Doctors on Health Policy Priorities

How important do you think each of the following health care issues should be for Congress to address this year...





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