

**Patient Care during the 2008-2009 Recession –  
Online Survey  
Executive Summary**

May 2009



## **Introduction**

In early 2009, staff from the AAFP's Marketing Research and Public Relations departments collaborated to develop a means to gauge the impact of the recession on patients seen by family physicians. This team developed an online survey to gather the opinions of family physicians on various topics related to the recession, such as patient load, deferral of preventive care, cutting of prescription doses, and other related issues.

This report summarizes the findings of this survey.

## **Executive Summary**

### **Overall patient load**

- Over half (54%) of survey respondents reported seeing fewer patients since the recession began.
- Only 13% of respondents reported seeing an increased number of patients.

### **Perceptions regarding insurance and patient payment**

- Nearly three out of four respondents (73%) reported an increase in uninsured patients.
- Sixty-four percent of respondents (64%) reported a decrease in the number of employer-sponsored/privately insured patients.

### **Attitudes about current healthcare issues**

- When asked about various issues related to healthcare in the current climate, the highest levels of agreement were reported by respondents with respect to concerns over patients' ability to pay for care (89%), increase in stress symptoms (87%), increase in patients' cutting prescription dosages (73%), and increases in uncompensated care (71%).

### **Helping patients deal with economic hardship**

- Sixty-six percent of respondents (66%) indicated taking specific actions to help their patients manage healthcare options with respect to the current economic climate.

## Detailed Findings

- Over half (54%) of survey respondents reported seeing fewer patients since the recession began.
- Only 13% of respondents reported seeing an increased number of patients.

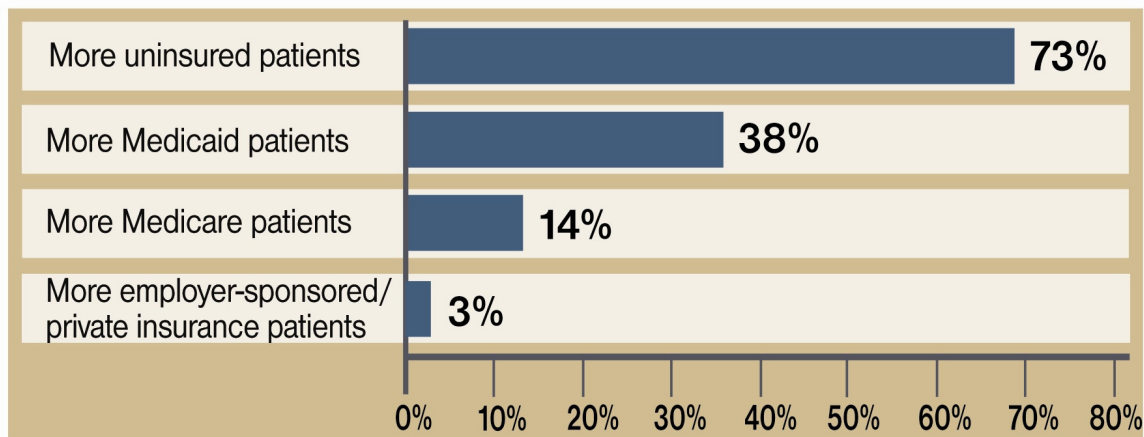
**Since the beginning of the most recent economic downturn (the past year or so), are you seeing more or fewer patients overall?**

Fewer patients	268	54%
More patients	62	13%
No change	138	28%
Don't know	26	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>494</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Perceptions regarding insurance and patient payment

- Nearly three out of four respondents (73%) reported an **increase** in uninsured patients.
- Sixty-four percent of respondents (64%) reported a **decrease** in the number of employer-sponsored/privately insured patients (see tables on the next page).

## Percent of Family Physicians Reporting Increase in Patients by Type of Coverage



*According to a survey conducted in March/April 2009 by the American Academy of Family Physicians in which AAFP members were asked to report their observations and experiences since the recession began in January 2008.*

## Total responses regarding insurance and patient payment

### Medicaid patients

Significant increase	35	7%
Moderate increase	147	31%
<b>TOP TWO BOXES COMBINED</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>38%</b>
No change	215	45%
Moderate decrease	11	2%
Significant decrease	6	1%
Don't know	62	13%
<b>Total</b>	<b>476</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Uninsured patients

Significant increase	104	21%
Moderate increase	253	51%
<b>TOP TWO BOXES COMBINED</b>	<b>357</b>	<b>73%</b>
No change	56	11%
Moderate decrease	31	6%
Significant decrease	25	5%
Don't know	23	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>492</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Employer-sponsored/private insurance patients

Significant increase	1	0%
Moderate increase	12	2%
<b>TOP TWO BOXES COMBINED</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>3%</b>
No change	131	27%
Moderate decrease	264	54%
Significant decrease	48	10%
Don't know	35	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>491</b>	<b>100%</b>

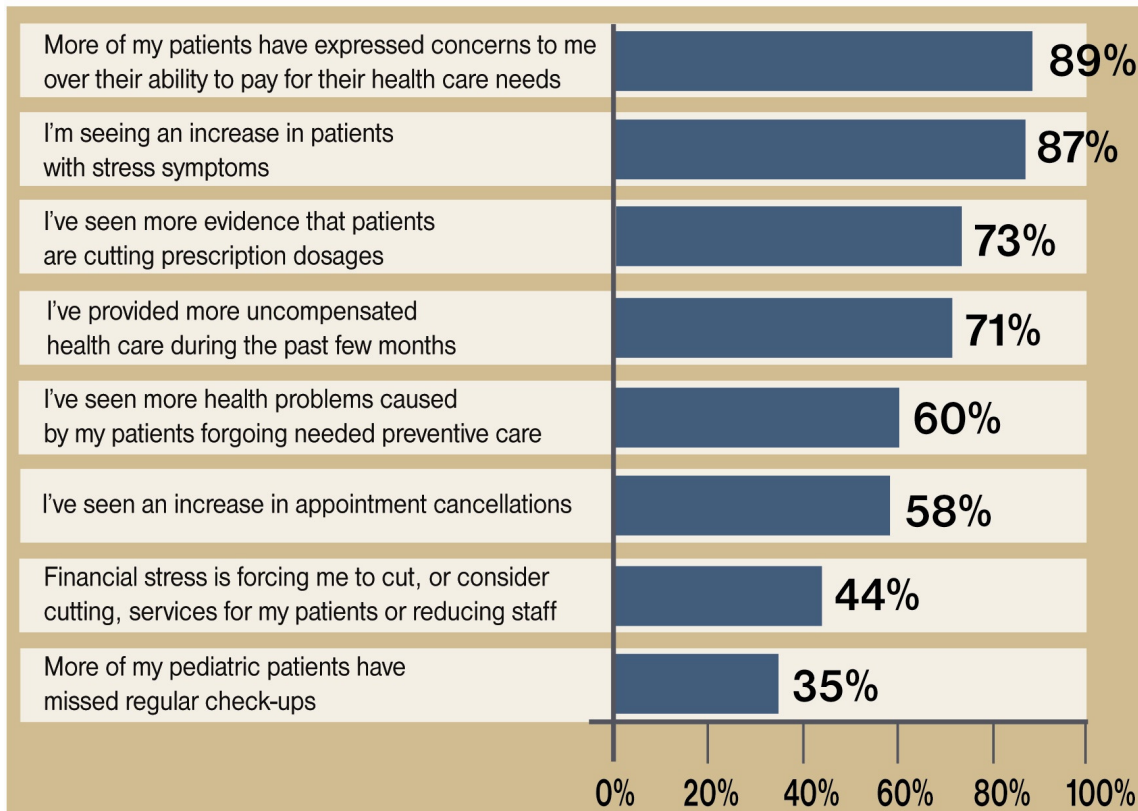
### Medicare patients

Significant increase	10	2%
Moderate increase	57	12%
<b>TOP TWO BOXES COMBINED</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>14%</b>
No change	326	67%
Moderate decrease	37	8%
Significant decrease	8	2%
Don't know	51	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>489</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Attitudes about current health care issues

- The highest levels of agreement were reported by respondents with respect to concerns over patients' ability to pay for care (89%), increase in stress symptoms (87%), increase in patients' cutting prescription dosages (73%), and increases in uncompensated care (71%).
- Sixty percent of respondents reported seeing more health problems caused by their patients forgoing needed preventive care, and 58 percent reported seeing an increase in appointment cancellations (see tables on the next page).

## Impact of Recession on Patients and Family Doctors



*According to a survey conducted in March/April 2009 by the American Academy of Family Physicians in which AAFP members were asked to report their observations and experiences since the recession began in January 2008.*

## Total responses reflecting attitudes about current health care issues

### More of my pediatric patients have missed regular check-ups

Strongly agree	17	4%
Agree	155	32%
<b>TOP TWO BOXES COMBINED</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>35%</b>
Neutral	146	30%
Disagree	74	15%
Strongly disagree	11	2%
Don't know	86	18%
<b>Total</b>	<b>489</b>	<b>100%</b>

### I've seen more evidence that patients are cutting prescription dosages

Strongly agree	84	17%
Agree	276	56%
<b>TOP TWO BOXES COMBINED</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>73%</b>
Neutral	69	14%
Disagree	45	9%
Strongly disagree	5	1%
Don't know	17	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>496</b>	<b>100%</b>

### I've provided more uncompensated health care during the past few months

Strongly agree	121	24%
Agree	231	47%
<b>TOP TWO BOXES COMBINED</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>71%</b>
Neutral	70	14%
Disagree	46	9%
Strongly disagree	6	1%
Don't know	21	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>100%</b>

### I'm seeing an increase in patients with stress symptoms

Strongly agree	214	43%
Agree	218	44%
<b>TOP TWO BOXES COMBINED</b>	<b>432</b>	<b>87%</b>
Neutral	36	7%
Disagree	19	4%
Strongly disagree	2	0%
Don't know	6	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>100%</b>

**I've seen more health problems caused by my patients forgoing needed preventive care**

Strongly agree	98	20%
Agree	201	40%
<b>TOP TWO BOXES COMBINED</b>	<b>299</b>	<b>60%</b>
Neutral	127	26%
Disagree	47	9%
Strongly disagree	6	1%
Don't know	19	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>498</b>	<b>100%</b>

**More of my patients have expressed concerns to me over their ability to pay for their health care needs**

Strongly agree	228	46%
Agree	215	43%
<b>TOP TWO BOXES COMBINED</b>	<b>443</b>	<b>89%</b>
Neutral	27	5%
Disagree	18	4%
Strongly disagree	2	0%
Don't know	8	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>498</b>	<b>100%</b>

**I've seen an increase in appointment cancellations**

Strongly agree	80	16%
Agree	204	42%
<b>TOP TWO BOXES COMBINED</b>	<b>284</b>	<b>58%</b>
Neutral	120	24%
Disagree	52	11%
Strongly disagree	6	1%
Don't know	29	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>491</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Financial stress is forcing me to make or consider cutting services for my patients or reducing staff**

Strongly agree	90	18%
Agree	126	26%
<b>TOP TWO BOXES COMBINED</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>44%</b>
Neutral	138	28%
Disagree	94	19%
Strongly disagree	25	5%
Don't know	21	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>494</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Helping patients deal with economic hardship

- Sixty-six percent of respondents (66%) indicated taking specific actions to help their patients manage healthcare options with respect to the current economic climate.

<b>Have you taken any specific actions to provide your patients with health care options or resources to help them in this economic downturn?</b>		
Yes	305	66%
No	156	34%
<b>Total</b>	<b>461</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Methodology

A random sample of 10,000 active members with known email addresses was drawn from the AAFP membership database. All individuals in this sample with a valid email address were sent a message with a link inviting them to take part in this survey. Of the 8,297 emails successfully sent, 505 members completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 6.1%.

## Limitations

While these results may indicate general trends and approximate trends among the broader population, all sample surveys are subject to multiple sources of error which are not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, error associated with non-response, error associated with question wording, and response options, and post survey weighting.