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Media Contact: Ellis Metz
(865) 805-0090
emetz@jarrardinc.com

QUICK RESTART OF US HOSPITALS CHALLENGED BY PATIENT FEARS: NATIONAL SURVEY

Consumers may delay needed elective surgeries in all medical facilities for several months

BRENTWOOD, Tenn., and Chicago – A majority of Americans express concerns about feeling “safe” in a medical facility today, but that their great trust in hospitals, nurses and physicians has only risen during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a new survey of U.S. consumers released today.

The findings reflect a significant challenge and an opportunity for America’s healthcare system, reeling from the financial impact of its response to the COVID-19 pandemic and urgently needing to win patients back for medical treatment, experts say.

Key findings from the poll include:

- A majority of Americans are concerned about their safety in medical settings. Fifty-one percent of respondents rated their feelings of safety in a healthcare facility as a five or lower on a 10-point scale. Women – who are primary influencers of healthcare consumption – and healthcare workers feel less safe than men.
- There is no consensus among Americans about when people will return to any medical facility for an elective procedure, but for more than a third of respondents (35 percent) that time frame is seven months or longer.
- Trust in nurses, physicians and hospitals is high (89 percent for nurses and doctors and 85 percent for hospitals) and has risen during the pandemic. This trust – particularly in physicians – can be leveraged to help consumers feel safe about returning to their healthcare facilities for care.

“Fear of the coronavirus is directly affecting patients’ decisions to seek medical care,” said David Jarrard, president and CEO of the national healthcare communications consultancy Jarrard Phillips Cate & Hancock.

“At the same time, hospitals and physicians have an extraordinarily high level of trust among consumers, which has only risen during the pandemic. If their facilities are, indeed, safe, they should leverage that trust now to assure patients and give them the confidence to get the care they need.”

The national online survey of 1,000 adults in the U.S. was conducted by Jarrard Inc. in partnership with Public Opinion Strategies (POS) between April 16 and April 20, 2020. The survey has a confidence interval of 3.53 percent. (An online discussion of the survey results will be held at 12:30 EDT on Friday, May 1. Registration can be found [here](#).)

The results demonstrate widespread effects of the novel coronavirus on the healthcare industry in America – from financial distress to accelerating new models of healthcare delivery.

“We see in these results a remarkable challenge, both for healthcare providers and individual healthcare consumers,” Jarrard said. “After weeks of explaining the importance of social distancing and other efforts to limit the virus’s spread, they now have substantial work to allay fears and show consumers that it’s safe to return for needed care. Essentially, patients respect clinicians and hospitals, but they’re afraid.”

Fear of the virus is extraordinary, with 78 percent fearing they or someone in their family will catch it. Today, it is a significant obstacle for patients in scheduling appointments and procedures, driving an apparent lengthened return to “normal” for healthcare providers. Most patients indicate it will be months, not weeks, to return for electives.

Americans will be forced to recalibrate what the definition of “normal” is. There is no shared sense about when this might occur and what constitutes safe enough to resume routine activities, including medical care.

On a positive note, the survey also shows that newer modes of care such as telehealth and “hospital-at-home,” which have seen measured adoption over the past few years but an explosion in use due to stay at home orders and social distancing during the pandemic, are likely to hold on to at least some of those gains, said Nicole McCleskey, a partner at Public Opinion Strategies.

Respondents who had received care through alternative modes had a largely positive view of their experience. Similarly, a strong majority of those who had not used telehealth were likely to consider it in the future. These results, combined with the challenges presented by patients’ reluctance to return to in-person healthcare encounters, suggest that providers have a unique opportunity in the wake of the pandemic to consolidate operational changes and adjust the modes of care they offer in the long-term.

“Americans have shown tremendous resilience and a willingness to adapt to changing life circumstances during the pandemic,” McCleskey said. “This likely extends to the healthcare delivery landscape as Americans view it through a different lens post-pandemic.”

About Jarrard Inc.

With offices in Nashville, Tenn. and Chicago, Jarrard Phillips Cate & Hancock, Inc. is a U.S. top 10 strategic communications consulting firm for the nation’s leading healthcare providers experiencing significant change, challenge or opportunity. Founded in 2006, the firm has worked with more than 500 clients in over 40 states and served as a communications advisor on more than \$60 billion in announced M&A and partnership transaction communications. The firm specializes in M&A, change management, issue navigation and strategic positioning, and has recently worked with more than 50 healthcare organizations on communications initiatives revolving around the coronavirus pandemic.

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About Public Opinion Strategies

Public Opinion Strategies is a market research company based in Alexandria, VA, specializing in political, corporate and public policy research. Since our founding in 1991, POS has become one of the 50 largest research firms in the country and has completed more than 22,000 research projects and interviewed over 10 million Americans. The firm currently represents six governors, 11 senators, and 44 members of Congress. Public Opinion Strategies also manages a vibrant public affairs practice, having completed more than 7,000 public affairs projects since its founding. The firm represents Fortune 500 companies and over 30 major trade associations and has become the premier health care research firm in the country, having completed more than 1,700 focus groups and more than 1,200 surveys on the topic of healthcare.