

# New study finds physicians comfortable with efficacy of generic medications

A new study by researchers at Harvard, Brigham and Women's Hospital and CVS Caremark finds that 23% of doctors' have negative perceptions of the effectiveness and quality of generic drugs and that may lead to doctors prescribing unnecessarily expensive medications.

In a study published in the *Annals of Pharmacotherapy*, the researchers said, "Overall, we found that the majority of physicians are comfortable with the efficacy of generic medications and are comfortable using generics themselves. However, there is a meaningful proportion who express concerns about generics. These beliefs could represent an important barrier to greater generic use and could contribute to elevated prescription costs for patients, insurance providers and society."

Lead author of the study William Shrank, MD, MSHS, of Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard said, "While there are many studies about how consumers and patients view generics, we thought it would be important to also look at the perception of generics by prescribers, because understanding the physician's perception can help us determine if there are other potential barriers to the greater use of generics. We don't have clear insight as to what might influence a prescriber's behaviour, and as we look to develop programs to encourage more cost-effective pharmacy care, this is an area industry and policy makers should be reviewing. We know that if we help patients access less expensive medications, they are more likely to take them."

## A small sample

The researchers surveyed more than 2700 physicians and received 506 responses from prescribers representing both specialists and general practitioners. More than 60% of the physicians surveyed were between 35 and 54 with physicians over 55 representing about 30% of the survey group; physicians aged 25 to 34 made up 9% of the respondents.

Physicians 55 or older were 3.3 times more likely to have negative perceptions about generics than those between 25 and 34. While the doctors said they were aware some patients struggle with the costs of medications, there was little relationship between the doctor's perception of cost burden and their perceptions of generics, the researchers said.

In addition, when asked how they are informed about the market entry of a generic medication, 75% said they receive their information from the pharmaceutical representatives. Other sources of information included medical journals (42%), colleagues (40%) and pharmaceutical mailings and literature (38%).

The researchers also said that the study is limited by the sample that was surveyed. While the sample was drawn from a

large source, the response rate was low; physicians who did respond may have differed from the overall population.

"Payers and policy makers attempting to stimulate cost-effective medication use should consider educating physicians, particularly older ones, to improve their comfort with generics," said study concludes.

Source: CVS Caremark

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