

# Orthopedic Patients' Satisfaction With Their Health Care Plan:

## A Study Performed by the Research and Education Committee of the Texas Orthopaedic Association

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### ABSTRACT

To determine the satisfaction of orthopedic patients in regards to their health care plan, a four-page questionnaire was designed, pilot tested, and sent to 200 orthopedic surgeons randomly selected from members of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons in Texas. Fifty-seven orthopedic surgeons were not eligible to participate; our eligible cohort was 143 orthopedic surgeons. These surgeons were asked to administer the questionnaire to 20 randomly selected patients. Fifty-six of the 143 orthopedic surgeons participated, and surveys were completed by 939 patients. Patients were asked to rate their satisfaction with their health insurance, access to primary care physicians, and access to orthopedic surgeons. Although satisfaction was generally high, the patients with a gatekeeper (no direct access to specialists) were significantly less satisfied with their access to primary care physicians and orthopedic surgeons than those without a gatekeeper.

The rising cost of health care in the United States over the past several decades has led to the recent emphasis on cost-containment strategies. One such strategy is the rapidly growing managed care industry, where the goal is to contain costs by directing patients to primary care physicians who agree to accept discounted fees and limit the number of referrals to specialist physicians. The quality of care being delivered is no longer the singular emphasis of our health care system. The current focus is on the value (quality of health care services in relation to the price)<sup>1</sup> of the care being delivered. Quality of

care is a term that may be difficult to define, particularly because it involves the quality of the provider, the hospital, and the health care plan.

One increasingly common method of measuring quality of care deploys patient satisfaction surveys. These surveys are most often used to measure the quality of care provided by physicians (and other practitioners) and hospitals. Less frequently, patient satisfaction surveys are designed to measure the quality of care provided by a health care plan.

The current investigation was intended to assess the satisfaction of orthopedic patients with their health care plan. Our specific aim was to determine whether direct access to specialists (no gatekeeper) plays a significant role in patient satisfaction.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### Questionnaire Design

A four-page questionnaire was designed and field tested by 11 members of the Research and Education Committee of the Texas Orthopaedic Association. The questionnaire was then edited by one of the authors (RWM), who is a recognized expert in the field of survey design and administration. The purpose of the questionnaire was to assess patients' satisfaction with their health care plans. It was designed to take approximately 10 minutes to complete and was available in both English and colloquial ("Tex-mex") Spanish versions. The questionnaire underwent pilot testing at 15 sites across Texas, with 20 patients completing the survey at each site, to ensure that the questions were easily understood by patients and that the questionnaire could be readily administered by office personnel without interrupting the clinical practice. Results of the pilot testing indicated that minor revisions to syntax and formatting were needed.

The questionnaire contained 21 items to be answered by the patients. These items included questions regarding whether the patient currently had health insurance, the patients' satisfaction with their health insurance, access to primary care physicians, and access to orthopedic surgeons. Patients were also asked to rate the overall cost of health care in the United States and the cost of

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