

THE DOCTOR'S REPORT CARD

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Foreword

The Tucson Osteopathic Medical Foundation was formed from the sale of Tucson General Hospital in 1986 and therefore has a heritage of primary care and patient education. It has committed itself to providing valuable information to improve the quality of life for our community through public education. It also actively collaborates with other organizations in pursuit of that goal with the intent of encouraging solutions to our most demanding and elusive healthcare problems. The purpose of this paper is to provide precisely that kind of information.

Introduction

In May, 2009, we asked 100 primary care physicians to give Tucson a physical.

Using an independent research firm which specializes in medical poll taking, and in collaboration with the Pima County Medical Society, the Tucson Osteopathic Medical Foundation sought to determine what those physicians who are on the front line of medical care had to say about what ails Tucson. Responding were 76 MD's and 24 D.O.'s from the primary care fields of family practice, obstetrics and gynecology, general practice and pediatrics. Like most of us when we go to the doctor for an annual checkup, there were some surprises, some gratifying and some unsettling.

We then took the findings and arbitrarily assigned letter grades to them, resulting in what we call the 2009 doctor's report card on the state of our health in Tucson and the immediate vicinity. A copy of the full report is available through the Tucson Osteopathic Medical Foundation.

The Report Card

Each physician was asked to examine 22 key health issues selected by WestGroup Research which are common in community surveys around the nation. In addition the doctors were asked to write in other issues about which they have serious concerns.

They were asked to rate the severity of each key health issue among Tucson residents based on their daily experience with patients. A five point ordinal scale was used. "5" meant an issue was a major problem. "1" meant it was a problem they see less frequently in their office. We took the results and assigned the most serious issues a general overall grade. We will look more closely at individual results later in this paper.

Grade: **C**

Slightly more than half of the doctors (51%) rated as major problems teen pregnancies, stroke, personal injuries (such as car accidents, bike accidents, and skateboard accidents), breast cancer and colon cancer with 60% seeing more teen pregnancies as a major problem along with stroke (59%). We get a “C” here. The doctors are seeing more of these than they feel they should.

Grade: **D**

The physicians would give us a D on our use of tobacco, drug and alcohol abuse, incidence of asthma and depression. An average of 70% of the doctors said these are major problems with the patients they are seeing.

Grade: **F**

When it comes to obesity in adults, obesity in children, hypertension and diabetes, we flunk. To a startling degree in fact.

An average of 90% of the 100 doctors in the survey said these were seriously major problems that they see far too much. Most startling of all is the fact that while 99% cite obesity in adults as a major problem in Tucson, a full 92% cite obesity in children in Tucson as a major problem as well.

Other Health Issues

When the doctors were asked if there were any other health issues that they believe are significant among Tucson residents, approximately three in five named additional problems.

Some of the most frequent mentions however are not specific health problems, but are concerns associated with healthcare in general. Leading the list of general concerns were:

- Access to healthcare, limited access to primary care and not enough primary care doctors. Ten of the 100 primary care doctors mentioned these issues.
- Cost of healthcare was mentioned by six of the doctors as a concern.
- Lack of health insurance was also mentioned by six of the respondents.

Leading the list of specific purely health problems that the doctors volunteered were:

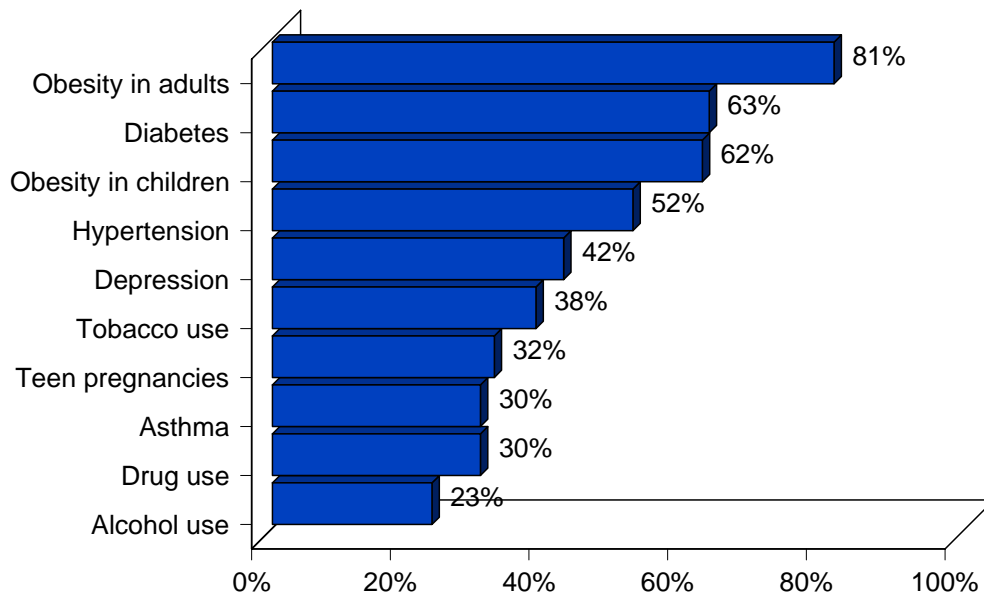
- Heart disease, coronary artery disease and congestive heart failure (7%).
- Valley fever, chronic pain, mental illness and allergies (4% each).

To us, the significance of these mentions is that they are sufficiently prominent in the minds of the physicians for them to take the time to write them in.

The Top Ten Health Issues

Based on the report card, the physicians were asked to cull out the top ten health issues they felt were a major problem in Tucson overall. Obesity in adults, diabetes which can be related to obesity and obesity in children were at the top of everyone's list. Their conclusions are shown in the chart below.

Top 10 Health Issues Rated as “Major” Problem in Tucson



n=100 (among those with an opinion)

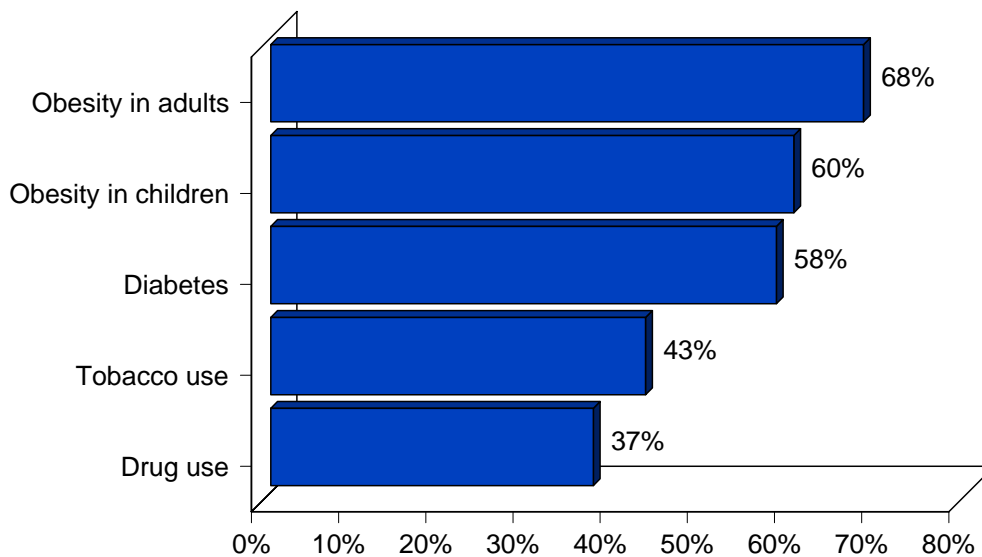
In addition to obesity, more than half of the doctors reported hypertension as a serious problem followed by depression, tobacco use, teen pregnancies, asthma and drug and alcohol abuse.

The Top Five Priorities

Having identified the top ten health issues, the primary care physicians polled were then asked to look at priorities. They were asked to indicate the top five health issues that they believe need to have the *highest priority* within the medical community for education and action. And, they were asked to rank them in *order* of priority. The following chart shows the results:

Health Issues Ranked as the Top Five Priorities in Tucson

(Percentage ranking issue as one of the top five priorities)



n=100 (among those with an opinion)

Significantly, obesity in adults, obesity in children, and diabetes all received the highest percentage of “number one” rankings further demonstrating the primary care doctor’s opinion that these three issues taken together are not only the most significant health problems they are seeing in their offices but these are the ones that should receive the highest priority in terms of education and action within the Tucson medical community.

Conclusions

Our primary care doctors clearly have given us a failing grade when it comes to obesity. Virtually all of them put adult obesity in the serious problem category and nine out of ten do the same for our children. It is very unusual for a survey of this type to get interlocking results of this nature so we know the problem is real and the call for action is thoughtfully based.

In addition we received a D for how we take care of ourselves involving drugs, alcohol and smoking. We also received a near failing grade for the high incidence of depression and hypertension. Tobacco and substance abuse were notable concerns.

Also notable because of the number of doctors who independently volunteered it, was the concern they have over access to healthcare and the related issues of cost of healthcare and the lack of adequate insurance to pay for it.

Recommendations

The Foundation in keeping with its mission of providing credible and pertinent information as a basis for community action to improve the quality of life for Tucson and Southern Arizona residents, has sought the opinions of primary care physicians about the state of our health. They have given us a physical, as it were, and a report card with the results.

While obesity is a national issue and one that has received a lot of press, the fact that our doctors are seeing such a striking problem with both adults *and* children in *our own community* is alarming.

But they have also given us a template for action on other issues as well, saying in effect, if we do nothing else, we should redouble our efforts as a community to tackle the priority issues along with diabetes, tobacco and substance abuse and we should perhaps focus more intently on the issues of access to healthcare.

The Foundation concurs. Our recommendation is for the development of a community dialog on these specific issues and where such a dialog exists to collaborate on efforts to reduce the incidence of these problems with a design for action.

These are health concerns which lead to other more debilitating health problems. If Tucson is to become a magnet for healthy economic and lifestyle development we feel these are issues which must be placed on that agenda.