



Patient Care *in the* Pandemic

AMG Healthcare's recent survey helps Alabama healthcare providers better understand what patients need to know to take care of themselves and their families in the era of COVID-19.



AMG HealthCare Patient Survey

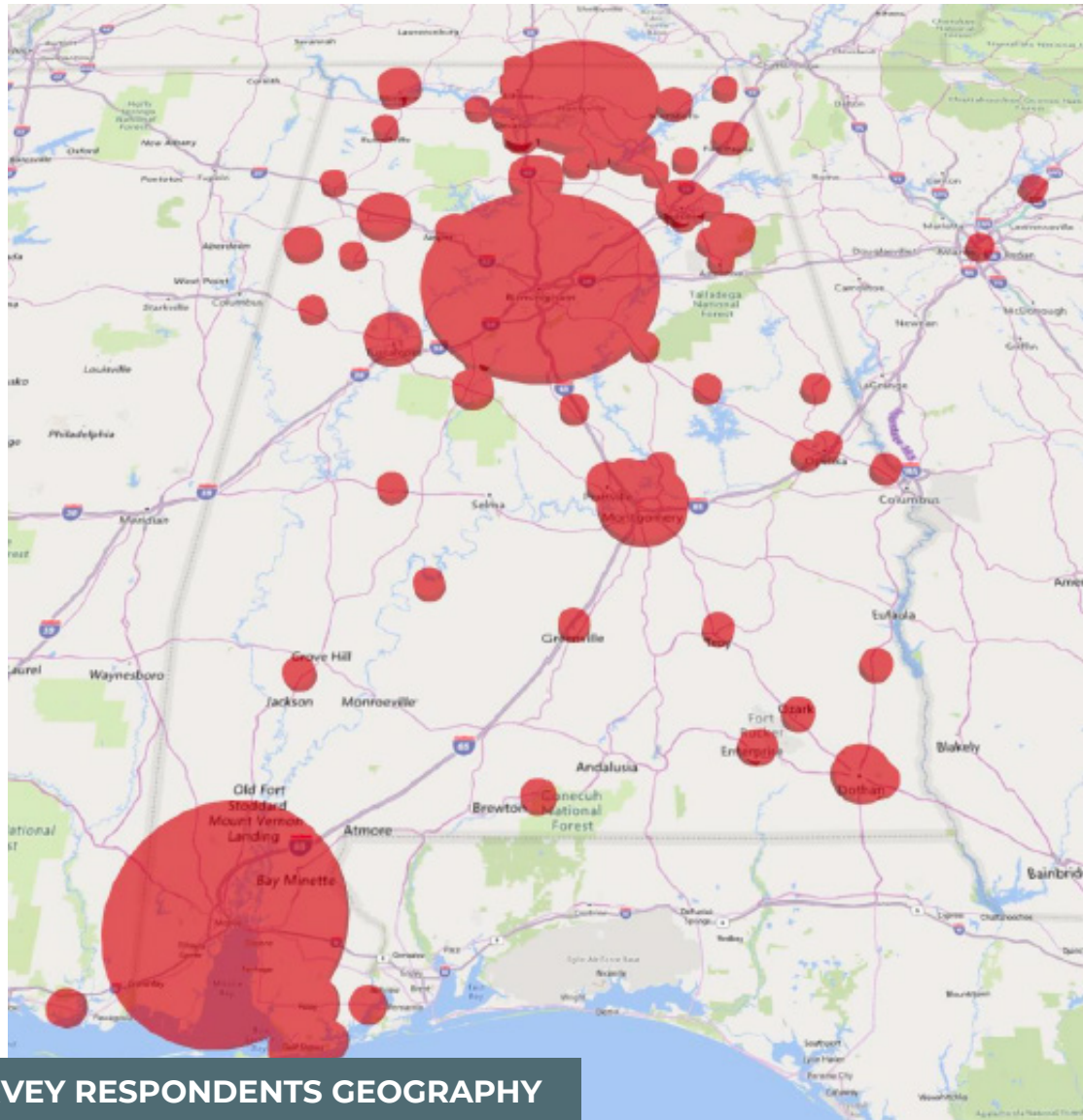
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Introduction

Healthcare is an essential part of our lives, but the pandemic has both increased the need for care and put routine visits and elective procedures on hold. As a result, there has been a major impact across the spectrum of care which includes both primary and specialty practices.

With all of the mixed messages in the marketplace, **AMG** knew the healthcare community would benefit from a better understanding of what patients needed to know to take care of themselves and their families in the COVID-19 world.

Therefore, we conducted a survey over four weeks in July of 2020, asking 415 Alabama patients about their sentiments, beliefs, and behaviors related to primary and specialty care in this uncertain time. The following map indicates the geography of participants.



SURVEY RESPONDENTS GEOGRAPHY



In our survey, we included several categories of questions, such as:

- Personal awareness and behavior related to COVID-19
- Routine care and appointments
- Patient information and communication with practices
- Deciding when to restart doctor visits
- Making appointments and telemedicine
- Changing doctors and specialists
- Propensity and timing regarding seeking new specialists
- Factors in choosing one doctor or specialist over another
- Advertising seen by patient prospects



By conducting this survey, **AMG** obtained key insights that practice owners, managers, and marketers can apply. By doing so, you can better address patient concerns in a way that supports sustaining and growing your practice within this challenging economic and medical environment.

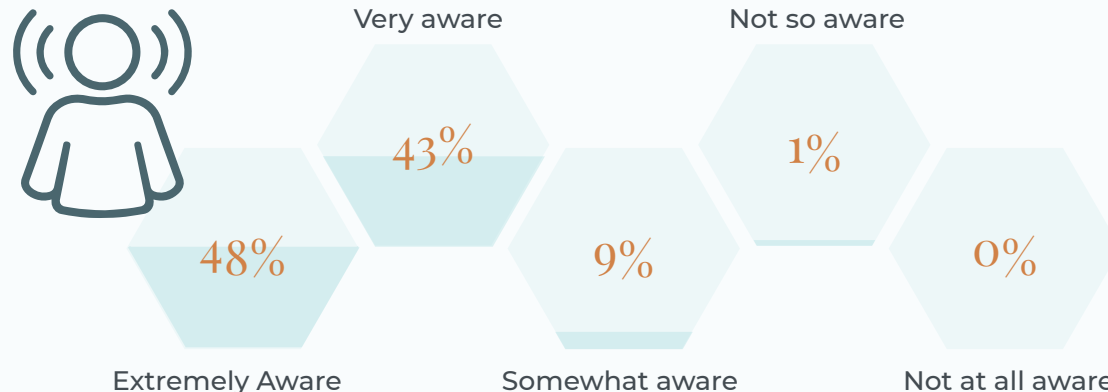


Results

We had a robust response from survey participants, which gave us a better understanding of what patients want and need from their healthcare providers. All results reported are within a margin of error of +/- 5%.

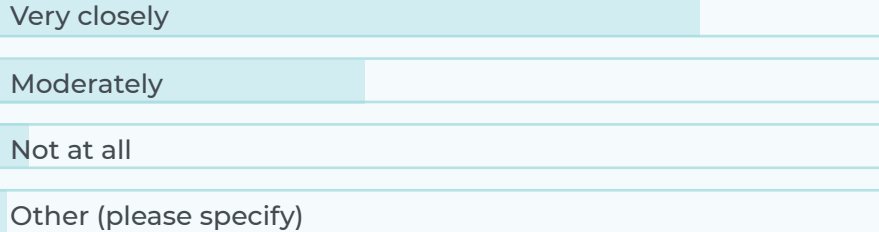
To get a sense of how informed patients are in this evolving climate, participants were asked about their level of awareness regarding CDC recommendations for preventing the spread of COVID-19 in healthcare settings. Combined, over 90% of respondents indicated they were either extremely or very aware of such recommendations.

How aware are you of the most current CDC recommendations for preventing the spread of COVID-19 infections in healthcare settings?





How closely do you follow/adhere to the most current CDC recommendations for preventing the spread of COVID-19 infections in the community?



Along the same lines, when participants were asked about how closely they adhered to the most current CDC recommendations to prevent community spread, over 95% responded that they followed them to some degree.

When asked whether COVID-19 had disrupted their routine healthcare appointment schedule, nearly 60% of participants responded this was the case and approximately 1/3 said they still weren't ready to start scheduling routine appointments again.

Has your routine healthcare appointment schedule been disrupted due to COVID-19 restrictions?

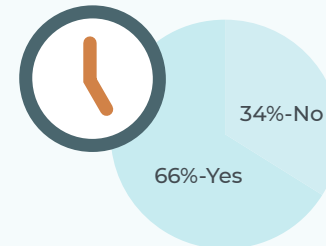


57% - Yes



43% - No

Have you started scheduling routine appointments again?





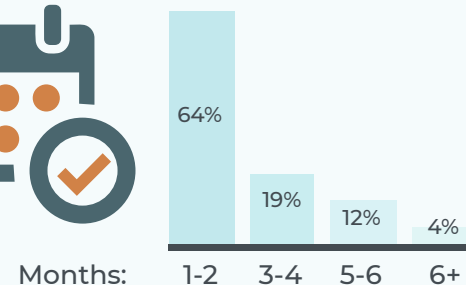
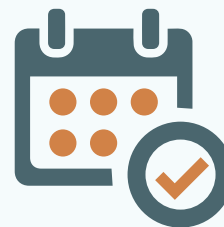
Those who said they hadn't started scheduling routine appointments again cited fear of being exposed to COVID-19 as their top reason for not doing so.

If you haven't started scheduling routine appointments again, which of the following most closely represents why this is the case?



Of those who had started scheduling appointments again, almost 65% said they had to wait 1-2 months to see their provider.

If you have started scheduling appointments again, how far in advance are they typically being scheduled?





Rate the following 4 factors most important to you to help you decide whether to start seeing your doctor(s) again.

* 1 being most 4 being the least

Feeling safe from exposure to COVID-19



Ease of appointment scheduling



Availability of telemedicine (virtual appointments)



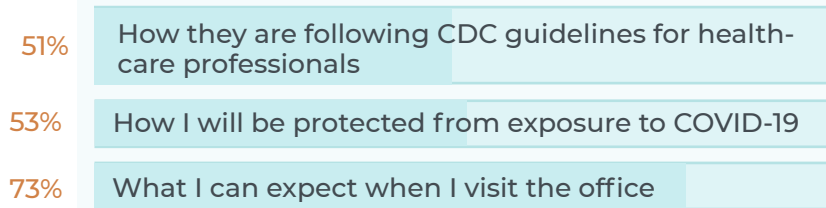
Level of urgency regarding my need for care



When asked to rate among four factors that were most important in helping participants decide whether to start seeing their doctor(s) again, 41% said the lower level of urgency was a factor and 38% of respondents chose feeling safe from exposure to COVID-19 as their top priorities. It is obvious that most of this group would rather postpone visits without assurances that they would be safe from contracting the virus.

As far as what type of information they needed from their provider offices to help them feel safe from COVID-19 exposure, the overwhelming majority of respondents (73%) indicated they wanted to know what to expect when visiting the office.

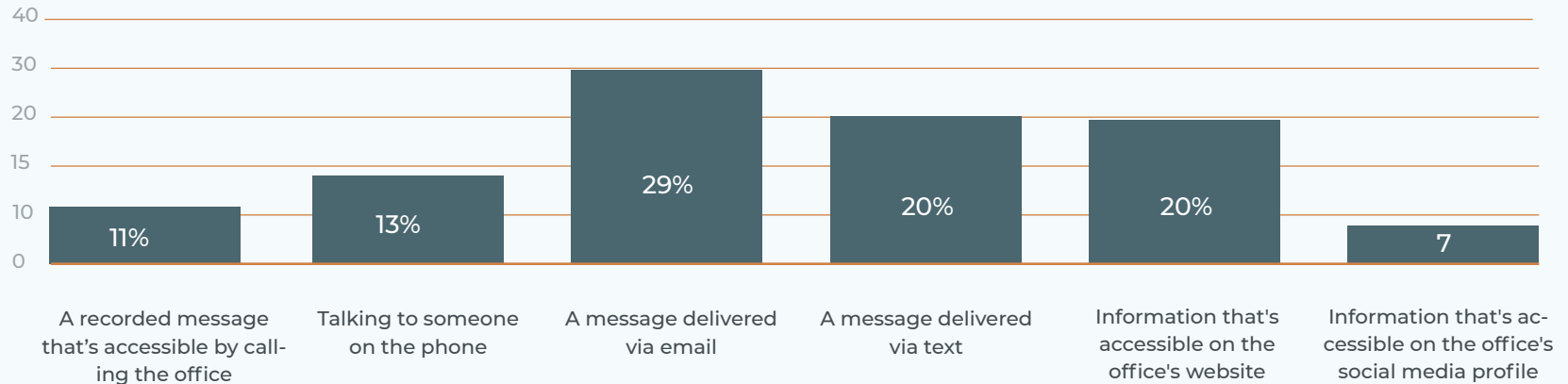
What type of information do you need from your doctor's office to help you feel safe from exposure to COVID-19 when visiting?





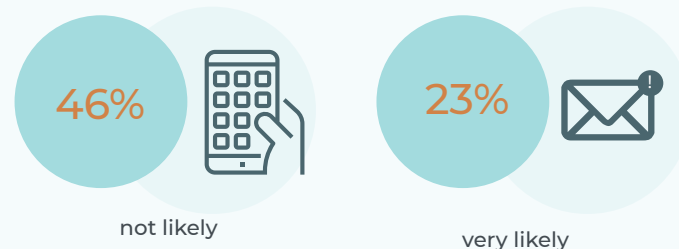
When asked about preferred communication channels regarding receiving information from their doctor's office regarding COVID-19 safety practices, email communications topped the list (29%).

How would you like to receive information from your doctor's office regarding their safety practices related to COVID-19?



Along the same lines, in the context of deciding when to restart their doctor visits, respondents indicated they relied on information obtained through email messaging the most, and social media messaging the least.

How much do you rely on information gathered/receive from visiting the social media accounts and email for your doctor's office to aid in decision-making about restarting routine visits?





When making appointments with your doctor's office, which of the following would you prefer?

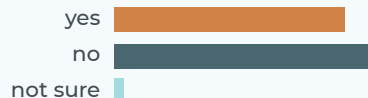


- Making appointments myself online
- Making appointments through text messaging
- Other (please specify)
- Speaking with someone on the phone

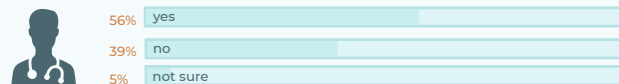
In terms of actually making appointments, respondents overwhelmingly (69%) said they'd like to speak to someone on the phone in order to do so.

When questioned regarding the use of telemedicine, although over half of respondents (52%) said they'd never used this type of technology to access care, 60% said they would be willing to use it if it helped them avoid an in-person visit.

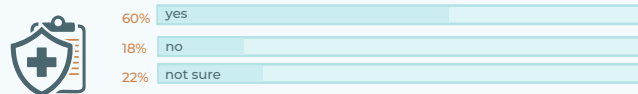
Have you ever visited with a healthcare professional using telemedicine?



Would you be willing to use telemedicine for virtual visits with your provider if it would help you avoid in-person visits to your doctor's office?



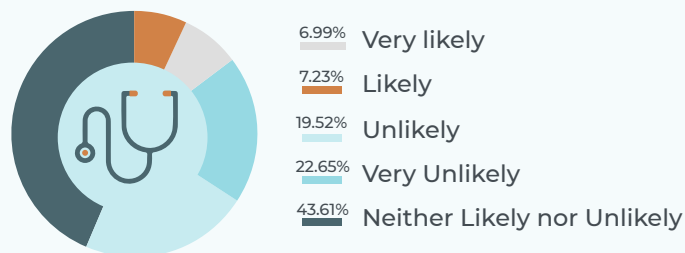
Does your insurance provider cover telemedicine usage?



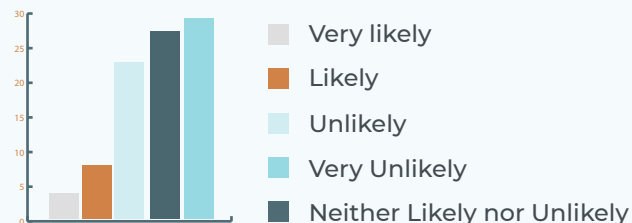


Although most respondents didn't seem inclined to change doctors in the coming year, the majority of those who showed interest in making a switch said they would likely do so sometime in the next 3 or 12 months.

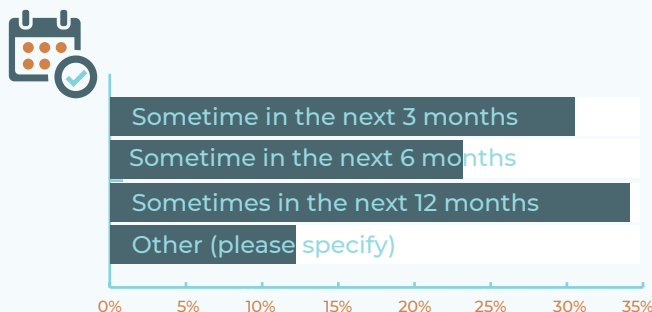
How likely are you to change to a new primary care doctor sometime within the coming year?



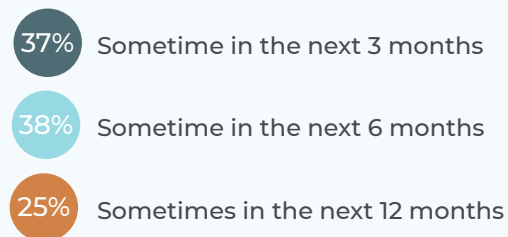
How likely are you to change from a current specialist to a new specialist sometime within the coming year?



If you are likely to change to a new primary care doctor, when are you likely to do so?



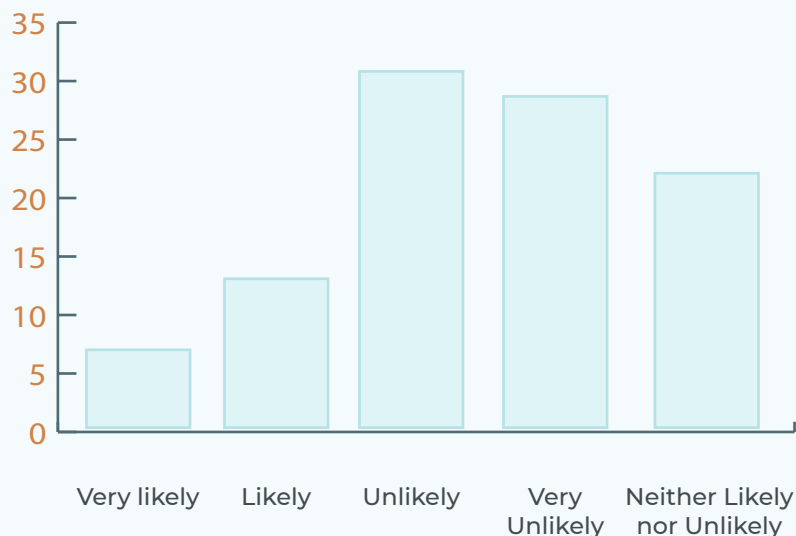
If you are likely to change from a current specialist to a new specialist, when are you likely to do so?





When asked if they thought they'd be seeking the services of a specialist for the first time within the next 12 months, the majority of respondents indicated that was either unlikely or very unlikely, but just over 30% seemed to be neutral. Of those who responded positively, the majority said they may do so within the next 6 months.

How likely are you to seek a specialist for the first time within the next 12 months?



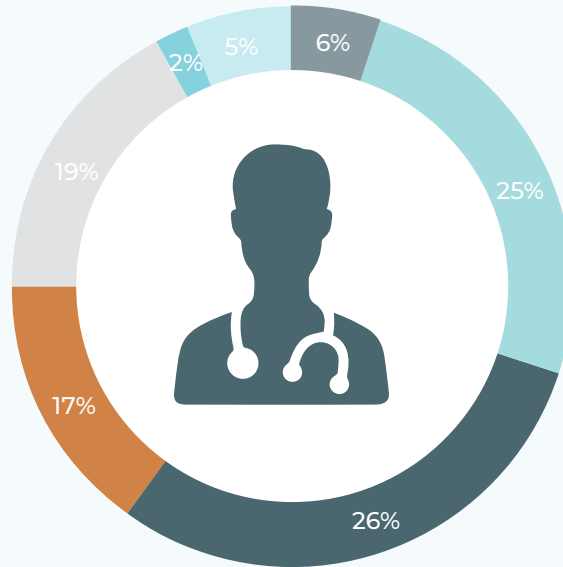
If you are likely to seek a specialist for the first time within the next 12 months, when are you likely to do so?



- Sometime in the next 3 months
- Sometime in the next 6 months
- Sometimes in the next 12 months
- Other (please specify)



Why would you choose one primary care doctor over another?

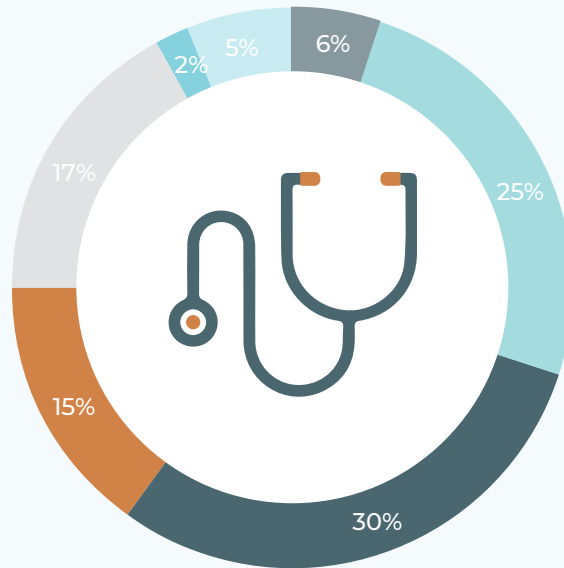


- I read about the doctor's practice or expertise on a news website or in social media.
- The doctor shared their expertise in some way that I could access—such as writing articles online.
- The doctor was recommended by a family member or friend.
- The doctor had positive online reviews.
- The doctor was recommended by another healthcare provider.
- The doctor was part of my insurance plan and had a profile on my insurance provider's website.
- The doctor ran an advertisement that attracted me to their practice.

Regarding which factors most influenced their decision to choose one primary care doctor over another, respondents ranked referrals from a family member or friend and referrals from another healthcare provider nearly evenly—followed by a provider being listed with a profile on their insurer's website and having positive online reviews.



Why would you choose one specialist over another?



- I read about the doctor's practice or expertise on a news website or in social media.
- The doctor shared their expertise in some way that I could access—such as writing articles online.
- The doctor was recommended by a family member or friend.
- The doctor had positive online reviews.
- The doctor was recommended by another healthcare provider.
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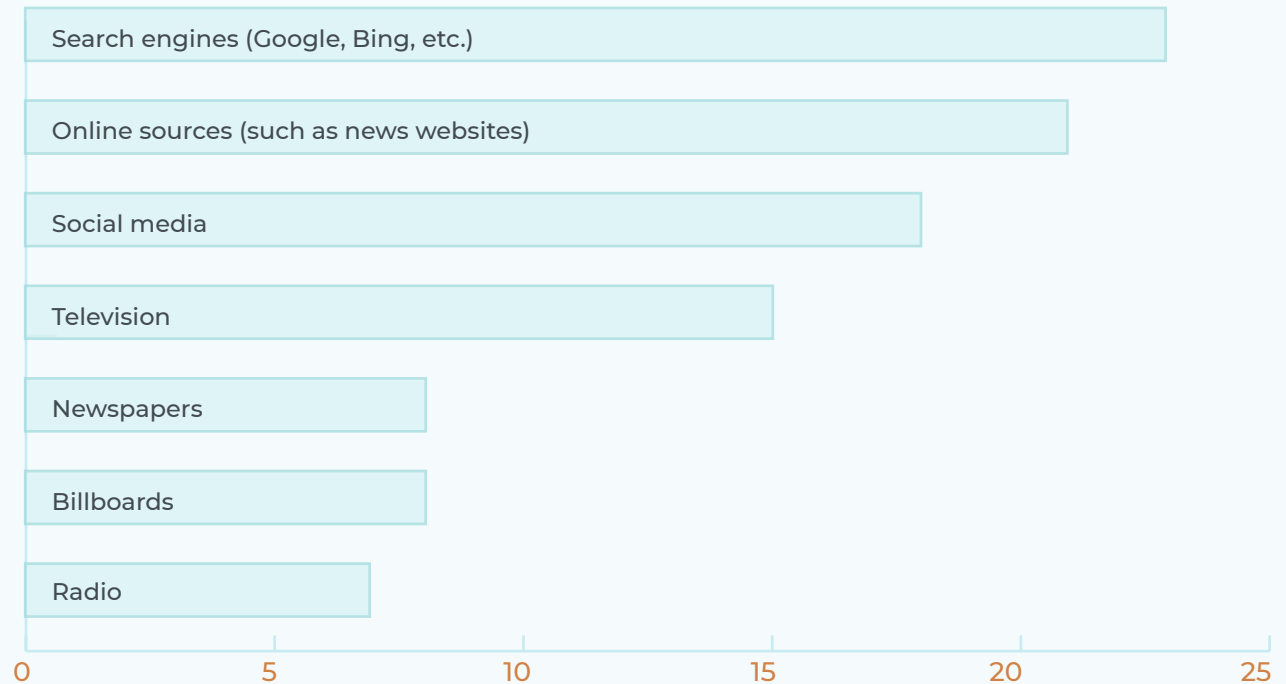
When asked what factors most influenced their decision to choose one specialist over another, the response was similar to that for choosing a primary care provider—with referrals from another healthcare provider topping the list, followed by referrals from family members and friends.



In terms of where they typically noticed advertising from doctors' office, the majority of respondents cited search engines (23%)—closely followed by online sources (21%), social media (18%), and television (15%).



Where do you typically notice doctor's advertising?





Key Takeaways

Based on the survey results, we uncovered 6 key takeaways you should consider applying to your practice to better meet the needs of patients and families in the era of COVID-19.

1. Help your patients feel safe.

Approximately 1/3 of the respondents indicated they're still not ready to resume their routine healthcare appointments—and the top reason cited was that they didn't feel safe enough to do so.

In this context, it's essential to let your patients know what measures have been put into place to ensure their safety when they come in for a visit. Since this is such a high priority in patients' minds, if you don't communicate this clearly, they may seek another provider who can.

2. Provide the information patients want the way they want it.

Along the same lines, patients indicated that the information they most want to receive relates to what they can expect when they do make office visits.

The two most popular channels cited for receiving that information were email and the provider's website. For greatest effectiveness, we recommend combining the two by ensuring that your email content includes links to the website content patients need to see.



3. Maintain a human touch.

Overwhelming, respondents said that when making an appointment, they wanted to talk to a real person on the phone.

While technology solutions may seem efficient, you might chase patients away if they give up in frustration because they can't get a human being on the other end of the line. You'll stand out from your competition if you maintain the human touch patients want and need.

4. Don't take patients for granted.

Although survey results indicated that most patients aren't necessarily interested in changing either their primary care doctors or specialists, they might consider doing just that if you don't provide what they need.

That's why it's important to pay attention to all of the items listed here—including how you'll be keeping them safe from COVID-19 exposure when they walk through your door. If you don't communicate that clearly, they may search for another provider who can.

5. Make your expertise known.

Helping new patients find their way to your front door is all about communicating your expertise. This is true in the context of referrals made from other healthcare providers, from a patient's family and friends and as the differentiating factor among providers found online.

You can build your reputation by showing off your expertise in a variety of ways—such as content marketing, blogs, community awareness events, engaging with other providers and within your relationships with insurance carriers. Each is part of a total package that can help you become better known within your community.



6. Digital is number one.

A lot of people are searching online to find the healthcare providers they need.

Although they may be highly influenced by recommendations from family, friends and other providers, responses to our survey indicate that prospects are still searching on their own for new doctors—which means they may not be content relying on what others say. When this is the case, they often use digital resources to conduct their own research to confirm what they've been told.

That's why providers must have a branding program in order to compete for patients who are relying on digital search, social and ads to find their next primary care doctor or specialist. The bottom line here is that reaching new and existing patients means you must be active on a lot of different channels—instead of passively relying on referrals or a word-of-mouth marketing approach.

Conclusion

Although healthcare practices across the spectrum of care have taken a hit at the hands of the pandemic, patients are still in need of the services they've relied on in the past. However, patient priorities have shifted within the era of COVID-19—which is why providers must ensure they understand these evolving dynamics so they can effectively address them.

At AMG Healthcare Marketing, we're the experts when it comes to understanding patient needs and helping you effectively communicate how your practice can meet them. Since we own the largest healthcare audience in Alabama through our own online sites and publications, this is especially true. Armed with unique insights like those discovered in this survey, we can provide digital marketing solutions that will help optimize your patient communications and effectively extend your reach.

If you'd like to learn more about how we can help your practice, let's talk.



We Are Here For You.

At AMG Healthcare Marketing, we're experts in specialty practice marketing. With our unique insights into the local patient market, we can provide digital marketing solutions that will optimize your efforts.

Through our offerings, we can help your practice:

- Tell your story from a local perspective.
- Reach more patients through AL.com—which is Alabama's largest and most trusted local news source.
- Increase performance—through the use of digital ads and sponsored content on AL.com, which drives better results than digital network advertising.
- Tightly target relevant audiences using HIPAA-compliant data specific to population health.

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