

Outside the comfort zone

It's not easy for physicians and patients to discuss money. In a survey on the subject by C. Caleb Alexander, MD, assistant professor at the University of Chicago, 133 internists and 484 patients from Midwestern academic and community practices identified some of the barriers. Examples are taken from respondents' comments. Respondents were allowed to name more than one barrier.

FOR PATIENTS

BARRIER (FREQUENCY)	EXAMPLE
Discomfort (19%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ "I didn't feel comfortable bringing up the issue."■ "I didn't know if it was normal"■ "Personal embarrassment"
Time (13%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ "They're too busy"■ "From past experience, it's not considered appropriate"
Physician lacked solution (11%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ "I thought that he wasn't a part of it or that it wouldn't be helpful"■ "I didn't know if it would make a difference"
Didn't anticipate problem (11%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ "I didn't know if my prescription was covered by my insurance"■ "I didn't think it was necessary"
Quality concerns (9%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ "For fear that they would give me a substitute that wouldn't work as well"■ "It might jeopardize my health"
Didn't know doctor's role (9%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ "Because you're not sure if he has anything to do with it"■ "Because from past experience, it's not considered appropriate"
Other (30%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ "Some of them may not know what the costs are"■ "Slipped my memory"■ "She hears it all day long"

FOR PHYSICIANS

BARRIER (FREQUENCY)	EXAMPLE
Time (67%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ "Too many other issues"
Physician lacked solution (19%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ "I had no solution to offer"
Discomfort (11%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ "It is better for me not to know the patient's burden because it makes me feel bad that they can't afford the medicine"
Quality concerns (8%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ "Unsure if it was appropriate to ask what their insurance covered as it implies treatment might vary based on method of payment"
Not physician's area (7%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ "I don't know each plan's co-insurance"■ "My own lack of knowledge of insurance and issues of coverage"
Other (11%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ "Mix of patients — poor and wealthy — answers will depend"

SOURCE: "BARRIERS TO PATIENT-PHYSICIAN COMMUNICATION ABOUT OUT-OF-POCKET COSTS" *JOURNAL OF GENERAL INTERNAL MEDICINE*, AUGUST 2004