

Medicare Beneficiaries' Attitudes About Seeking Health Care: 1996

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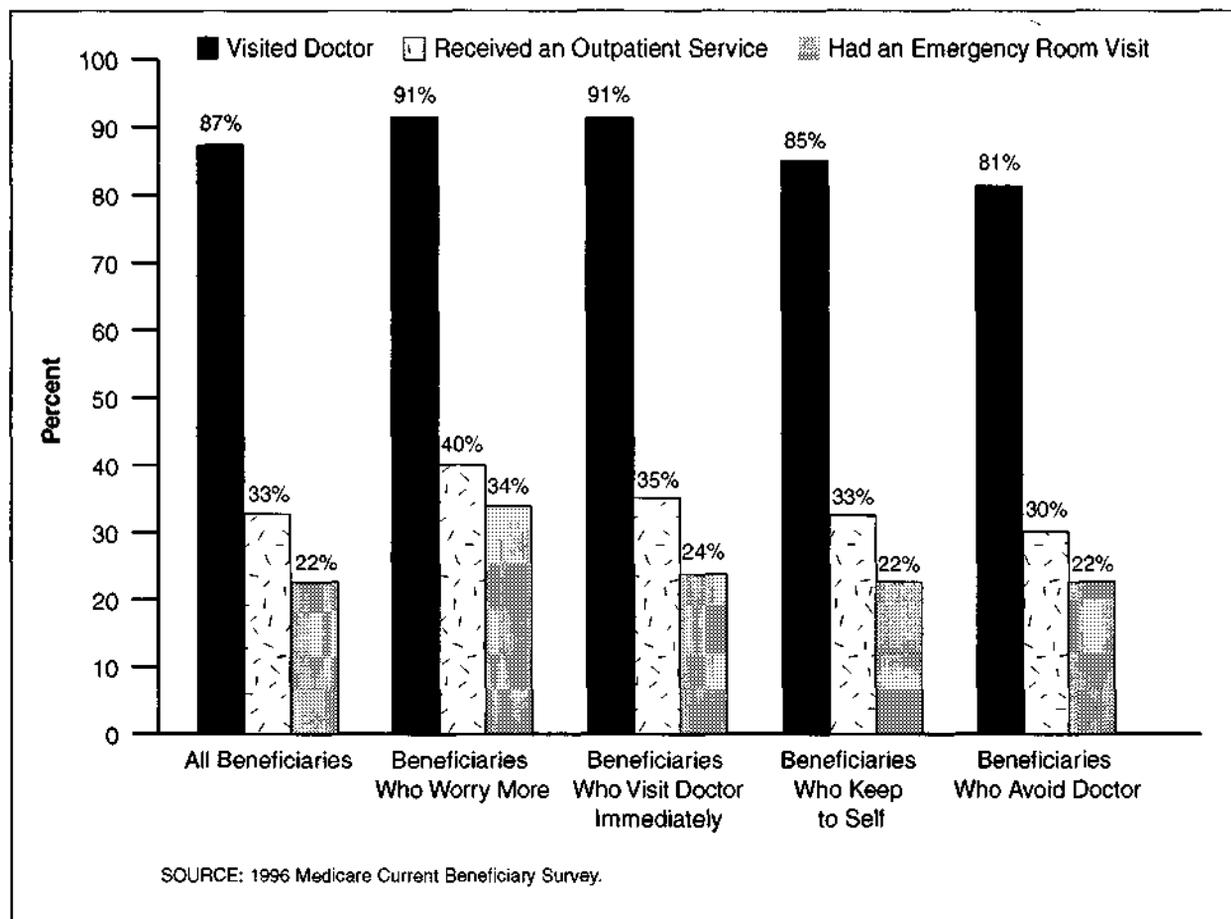
The Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey (MCBS) is a powerful tool for analyzing the Medicare population. Based on a stratified random sample, we can derive information about the health care use, expenditure, and financing of Medicare's 36 million enrollees. We can also learn about those enrollees' health status, living arrangements, and access to and satisfaction with care.

Figures 1 and 2 compare the attitudes of Medicare beneficiary regarding the use of health care services with their actual use of different types of service. In the fall of 1996, non-institutionalized beneficiaries

were asked to respond true or false to the following statements: "You worry about your health more than other people your age," "You will do just about anything to avoid going to the doctor," "When you are sick, you try to keep it to yourself," "Usually, you go to the doctor as soon as you start to feel bad." Figure 1 compares responses to these questions with whether the beneficiary used any emergency room, outpatient hospital or doctor services during the year. Figure 2 compares beneficiary attitudes about medical care with their use of preventative services during the year.

Figure 1

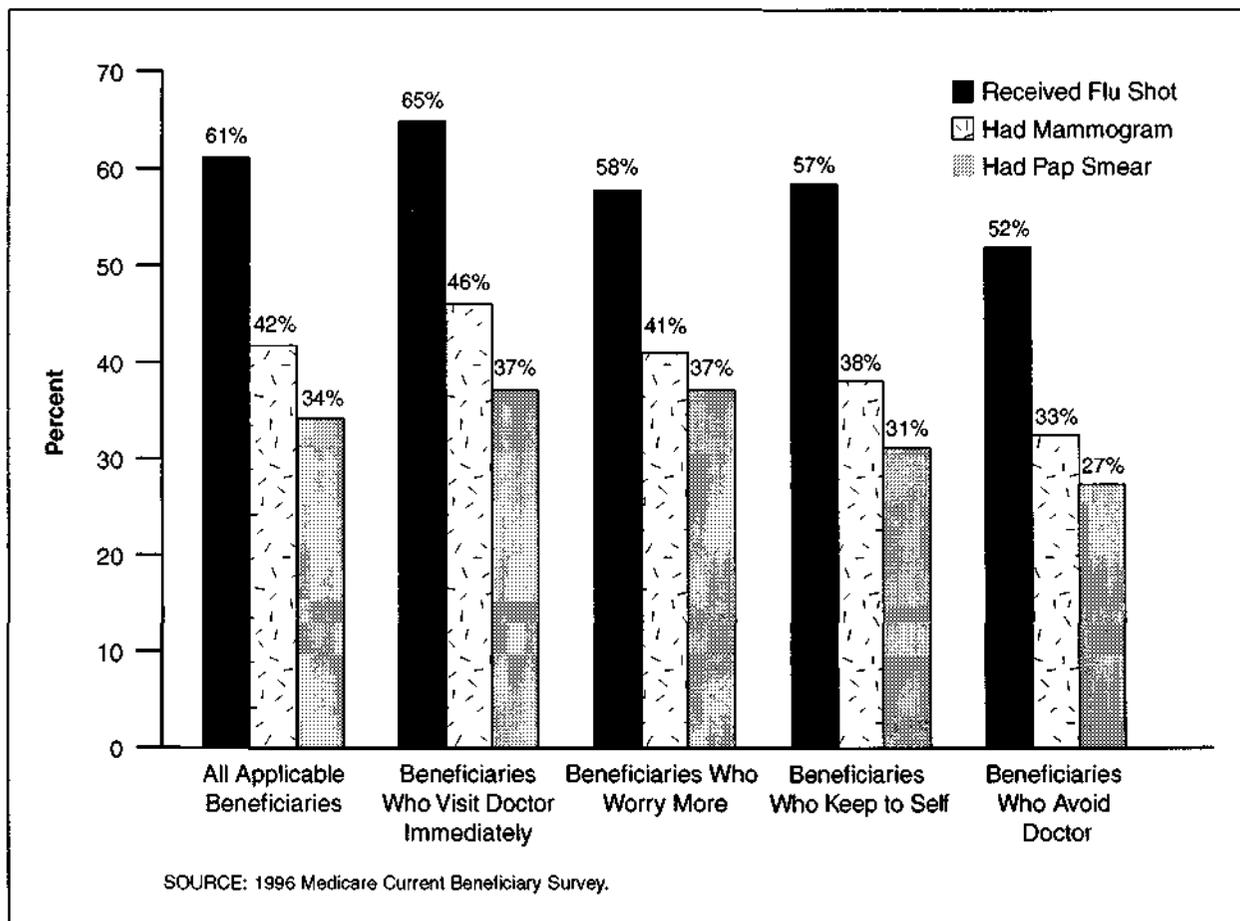
Medicare Beneficiaries' Attitudes About Seeking Health Care Compared to Their Use of Different Types of Service: 1996



- Beneficiaries who indicate they worry more than others their age have a 50-percent higher user rate of emergency room services (34 percent) than beneficiaries overall (22 percent).
- Beneficiaries who indicate that they worry more about their health than people their age are more likely to be users of all three type of service, as are beneficiaries who indicate they usually go to the doctor as soon as they begin to feel bad.
- Beneficiaries who agree that they will do just about anything to avoid going to the doctor are less likely to have an outpatient hospital or doctor visit, but they are just as likely to have an emergency room visit as beneficiaries overall, while beneficiaries who indicate that they keep to themselves when they feel sick are about as likely to use each of the three types of service as beneficiaries overall.

Figure 2

Medicare Beneficiaries' Attitudes About Seeking Health Care Compared to Their Use of Preventative Services: 1996



- Beneficiaries who indicate they usually go to the doctor as soon as they begin to feel bad are more likely to use all three preventative services.
- Beneficiaries who indicate that they worry more about their health than people their age are less likely to have a flu shot than beneficiaries overall, but more likely to have a pap smear.
- Beneficiaries who indicate that they will do just about anything to avoid going to the doctor are much less likely to use preventative services, while beneficiaries who indicate that they keep to themselves when they feel sick are slightly less likely to use each of the preventative services than beneficiaries overall.

The authors are with the Office of the Actuary, Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA). The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of HCFA.

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