

Perceptions of patients' use of health information before a consultation

A summary of key findings from the online survey conducted in September 2018

METHODOLOGY AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The survey was conducted online by Doctors.net.uk, the UK's leading online professional health community (part of M3 Group) with quotas to ensure good regional representation.

234 DOCTORS



111 PRIMARY CARE



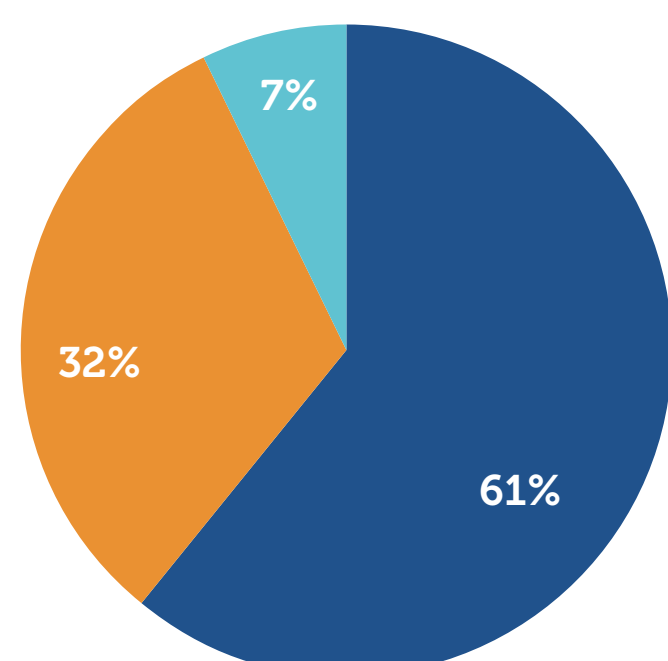
57% MALE MEDIAN AGE 40-49 43% FEMALE

123 SECONDARY SPECIALIST



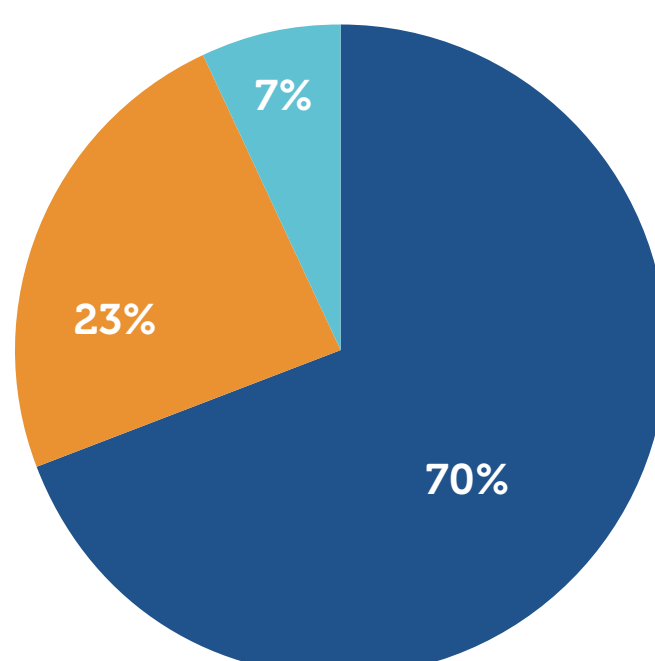
59% MALE MEDIAN AGE 40-49 41% FEMALE

PRIMARY CARE



- GP PARTNER
- SALARIED
- LOCUM

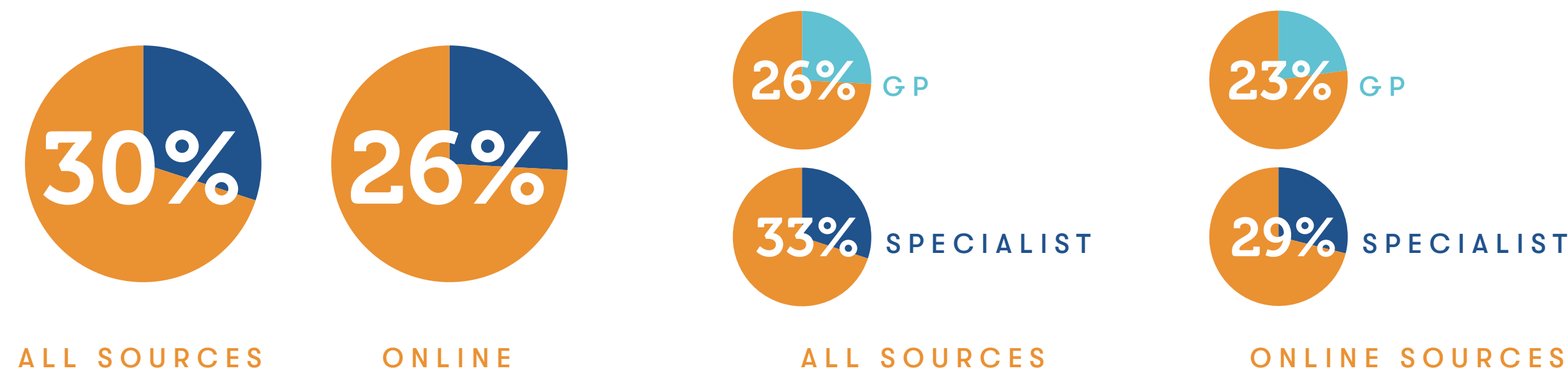
SECONDARY/SPECIALIST



- CONSULTANT
- TRAINING
- OTHER

The overall sample was 58% male respondents which is similar to the overall NHS workforce for medical and dental staff in the NHS (55% male NHS employers data). Our sample for primary care was 43% female respondents, whereas the NHS average is reported as 52% female. The sample included a wide range of seniorities (junior doctors were excluded).

ONE THIRD OF PATIENTS ACCESS HEALTH INFORMATION BEFORE A CONSULTATION



Key findings

The survey showed that doctors think only 1/3 of patients look up health information before a consultation and that just over a quarter use online sources. More Specialists think patients have accessed health information before a consultation than GPs.

ONLINE INFORMATION CREATES CONCERN OR ANXIETY



Key findings

There was agreement across GPs and Specialists that online health information creates unnecessary concern or anxiety in patients

DOCTORS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS HEALTH INFORMATION

“

Patients need to understand that **Google is not Dr.**

“

People have a **poor understanding** and looking online causes panic.

“

They all think they have cancer. They **cannot process likelihood** or that common things are common.

“

Healthcare professionals underestimate **patients' ability to access & understand** healthcare related information.

“

I work in a deprived area... we have lots of patients with **general literacy issues**. Medical terms are foreign language to them. It's easy to forget how little they understand.

“

Many patients **struggle to understand** letters from the NHS and often bring them in to get them read.

*Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.
For further information on our survey results and activities of our group, please visit:
<https://pmsociety.org.uk/category/patient-engagement>

PATIENTS USE ‘DR GOOGLE’ MORE THAN OTHER INFORMATION SOURCES



GP	Specialist
1 Dr Google	1 Dr Google
2 Social media	2 WebMD
3 Newspapers/Magazines	3 Pharmaceutical websites
4 Wikipedia	4 Newspapers/Magazines
5 NHS Choices	5 Social media
6 GP practice website	6 Wikipedia
7 WebMD	7 GP practice website
8 Pharmaceutical websites	8 NHS Choices
9 Blogs, forums, patient communities	9 Patient charity websites
10 Patient.co.uk	10 Blogs, forums, patient communities
11 Patient charity websites	11 Patient.co.uk

Key findings

GPs thought that patients used arguably more untrustworthy sources (e.g social media, news media and Wikipedia) for health information more often than trustworthy sources (e.g Patient.co.uk, health charity and pharmaceutical websites), suggesting they feel patients are not receiving accurate health information prior to consultations. **Specialists** thought that, after ‘Dr Google’, patients were generally accessing information from more trustworthy sources.

When asked what online sources of health information were thought to be used most by patients, all doctors surveyed listed ‘**Dr Google**’ as their top answer. As Google itself does not provide health information, this could potentially mean that doctors believed patients were getting unregulated/poor quality health information prior to their consultations. This would correlate with the findings above, that doctors felt online health information causes unnecessary concern.

Interestingly, however, there was only a very slight trend in favour of doctors advising patients to avoid using Google for health information. This might suggest doctors believe some prior information access is a good thing, provided it is of high quality and won’t raise unnecessary worries in patients.

*Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.
For further information on our survey results and activities of our group, please visit:
<https://pmsociety.org.uk/category/patient-engagement>