

# MedAdNews

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## Hospitalists cannot be ignored

By Ted Bittner and Ed Doylet

**H**ospital medicine is the newest and fastest growing specialty in U.S. healthcare. Pharmaceutical marketers looking for new avenues of growth for their products should make hospitalists a target market as they play an increasing role in delivering patient care in hospitals. Because hospitalists are relatively new to U.S. medicine, not much is known about their prescribing habits. Hospitalists, 85% of whom were trained as internists, care for hospitalized patients from the time they are admitted until the time they are discharged and transitioned back to their primary care physician. Since the term “hospitalist” was coined in a 1996 issue of *The New England Journal of Medicine*, the specialty has exploded. In the past 10 years, the number of hospitalists has expanded from just a few thousand to more than 30,000, and thousands more are expected to saturate just about all acute care hospitals.

To get a handle on the role that hospitalists play in the nation's hospitals, *Today's Hospitalist* magazine commissioned an online survey of about 5,000 of its nearly 20,000 hospitalist readers. The resulting report, “Productivity Of Hospitalists in the U.S. Healthcare System,” offers a glimpse of what nearly 500 hospitalists had to say about their role in inpatient care, their prescribing activity, and their preferred publications for obtaining important information.

Most respondents (88%) stated that over the last three to four years, the hospitals where they work have experienced increases in the number of patients they treat. Virtually

all of the hospitalists in the survey, or 98%, also stated that during that same time frame, hospitalists have become more important in delivering care in their hospital. Because of their growing presence in U.S. hospitals, hospitalists are a very busy group of physicians. The hospitalists in the survey said that on average, they work 12-hour shifts and see an average of 20 different patients during those shifts. If we assume that 30,000 hospitalists are working just two shifts, the specialty is seeing well over 1 million patients a year.

To get an idea of exactly what kind of care hospitalists provide, it's helpful to look at the types of patients that hospitalists are treating. A typical patient, for example, might have several co-morbid conditions, including diabetes, congestive heart failure, and hypertension. The survey found that hospitalists treat an average of four different diseases per patient.

Because they are treating such an acutely ill population, hospitalists write an average of 44 prescriptions per shift, or roughly one prescription every 15 minutes. A full 11% of survey respondents reported writing more than 50 prescriptions per shift.

Those prescriptions cover a wide range of the most common inpatient conditions. When asked to check off the drugs they prescribe, more than 90% of hospitalists said they regularly prescribe a long list of therapies: anticoagulants/antiplatelets (93%), antimicrobials/antibiotics (98%), cardiac drugs (96%), COPD/asthma agents (99%), diabetes drugs (96%), gastrointestinal drugs (99%), neurologic agents (93%), pain management drugs (99%), and psychiatric agents (92%).

The survey yielded even more specific data on hospitalists' prescribing patterns. Hospitalists prescribe 14 different classes of cardiovascular drugs, including ACE inhibitors, beta-blockers, diuretics, calcium channel blockers, and lipid-lowering agents. They also prescribe an average of 12.4 lipid lower-

ing agents per week.

The data also point to another important trend: hospitalists frequently make changes to the drug therapies that patients are already taking when they enter the hospital and when they are discharged. On average, hospitalists change prescriptions for 37% of their patients.

Although hospitalists are writing a major amount of prescriptions themselves, they are also changing the prescribing patterns of other physicians in the hospital. Hospitalists say they are opinion leaders in their facilities. Eighty-three percent say they are frequently sought out by other physicians for advice on patient care issues and more than half (54%) are frequently sought out for input on the proper drugs to prescribe.

Nearly nine out of 10 hospitalists, or 86%, are involved with teams/groups/committees, such as P&T and protocol development, that determine clinical and patient care policies and approaches, with 50% having team management responsibilities. Other physicians are taking note of hospitalists' rising role and asking them to manage their patients. Eight out of 10 hospitalists say they are experiencing a strong trend in other physicians requesting them to help manage the medical conditions of their patients. Co-management is most common with orthopedic patients but is possible with any surgical specialty.

Pharmaceutical marketers have been slow to realize the potential that hospitalists present. In our survey, for example, only 32% of hospitalists report they have any contact with detailers. The other 68% say they have no contact with pharmaceutical representatives. Those hospitalists who do regularly see drug company representatives do so less than once per week. Manufacturers who are intent on branding their products with highly influential professionals in the hospital setting should consider hospitalists to be a primary focus.