



NACDS Foundation Public Opinion Research



Attitudes About Importing Medication

March 12, 2003

Introduction

Public Opinion Research is conducted by the NACDS Foundation to support better communication on the views the public has about issues affecting community pharmacy.

Our research partner, Wirthlin Worldwide, has conducted research with us since 1999. We monitor and publish trend data as well as periodic reports covering topics of special interest. The data presented here are from a National Quorum Survey of 1,005 adults in the United States conducted by Wirthlin Worldwide.

To find out more about the NACDS Foundation's Public Opinion Research Projects, contact us at 703-549-3001 or foundation@nacds.org.

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Attitudes About Importing Medication

INSIGHTS ON SHIFTS IN OPINION

- Two-thirds of the surveyed Americans began the survey favoring the practice of individuals in the U.S. purchasing their medications from Canada, although only 2% actually said they had done so.
- Based on what they knew at the beginning of the survey, nearly 6 of 10 at first said they would encourage a family member, friend, or close personal acquaintance to purchase medications from Canada.
- However, information from the FDA or consumer groups about negative consequences and potential dangers of illegally imported prescription drugs caused more consumers to say they would oppose the practice and discourage others from pursuing it.
- After receiving more information about the concerns associated with importing medications, 29% shifted from being in favor of to opposing for a total of 58% in opposition.
- After receiving more information about the concerns associated with importing medications, 26% shifted from “encouraging others” to “discouraging others,” which is a total of 64% discouraging others

Findings

61% of Americans have seen, read or heard something in the last 6 months about the issue of US citizens purchasing their prescription medication from Canada or Mexico.

45% felt that they were very informed or somewhat informed on the topic of purchasing drugs from Canada or Mexico.

Overall, **67%** were somewhat or strongly in favor of the practice at the beginning of the survey.

... 75% of those age 55 and over were in favor.

... 81% of New Englanders were in favor.

... Of those who were very or somewhat informed on the topic, 77% were in favor.

4% of the respondents said that they or someone in their household had purchased prescription drugs from Canada (2%), Mexico (2%), or somewhere else outside of the United States within the past two years.

... 70% of these had been purchased in person and brought back into the U.S. by the consumer or someone else on their behalf.

... 15% purchased through a U.S. store front or over the internet and shipped to the consumer.

... 95% of those who had bought prescription drugs from another country were white.

On ordering prescriptions from Canada...

REGARDING THE PRACTICE OF ORDERING PRESCRIPTION DRUGS FROM CANADA OVER THE INTERNET, DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THESE STATEMENTS?

STRONGLY OR SOMEWHAT AGREE		STRONGLY OR SOMEWHAT DISAGREE
88%	<i>If you cannot be sure where a medication is from and who made it, then you shouldn't take it.</i>	11%
77%	<i>If people can't afford the cost of prescription drugs here in the US, it is better to let them purchase what they need at a lower price from Canada.</i>	21%
77%	<i>If it is illegal to import prescription drugs from Canada, people should not do it.</i>	21%
54%	<i>Importing medications from Canada poses a serious risk because there is no guarantee that you are getting what they say you are.</i>	39%
54%	<i>The medication from Canadian companies is exactly the same as what we have here in the US at our local pharmacies.</i>	29%

What influences opinions?

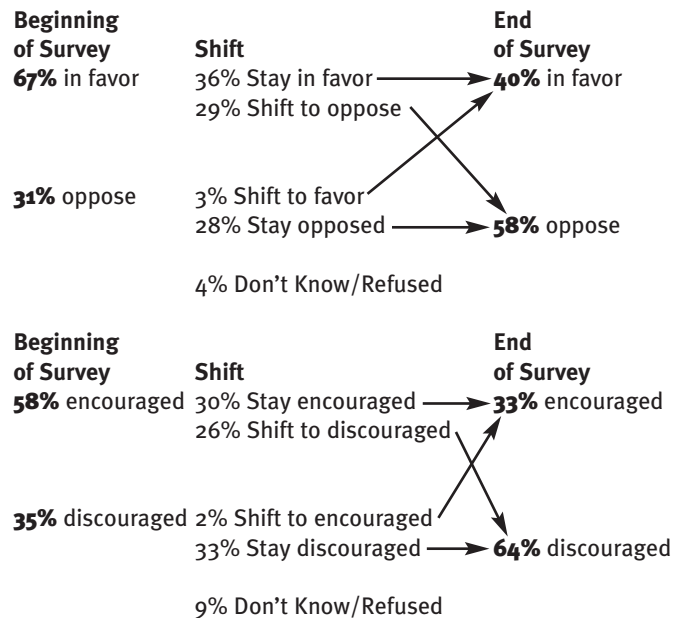
DOES THIS INFORMATION MAKE YOU MORE IN FAVOR OF OR MORE OPPOSED TO THE PRACTICE OF IMPORTING PRESCRIPTION DRUGS. . .

SOMEWHAT OR MUCH MORE OPPOSED		SOMEWHAT OR MUCH MORE IN FAVOR
84%	<i>The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has testified to Congress about hundreds of serious illnesses and deaths caused by individuals taking unsafe, contaminated, or fake medications purchased illegally from foreign countries.</i>	11%
82%	<i>Medications ordered over the Internet and imported illegally from Canada include drugs manufactured in countries other than the U.S. or Canada.</i>	11%
82%	<i>Citizen and Consumer Groups oppose prescription drug importation because the illegal companies cannot certify and guarantee the purity and safety of the medications they provide.</i>	12%
81%	<i>Drugs imported into the U.S. from Canada may be damaged due to incorrect storage temperatures and handling procedures.</i>	11%
81%	<i>The practice of importing prescription medication is creating large-scale drug counterfeiting operations that are tainting the supply of medication.</i>	12%

SOMEWHAT OR MUCH MORE OPPOSED		SOMEWHAT OR MUCH MORE IN FAVOR
78%	<i>Importing prescription medications poses a significant threat to our National Security, exposing us to bio-terrorism, drug counterfeiting, and illegal trafficking across our borders.</i>	12%
76%	<i>Today, importing prescription medication from Canada into the United States is illegal.</i>	18%
72%	<i>The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has issued strong warnings about the dangers of importing prescription medications into the U.S.</i>	20%
70%	<i>National Medical Associations recommend that consumers avoid purchasing medications from foreign sources because of concerns about health and safety.</i>	21%
58%	<i>Local community pharmacists are strongly opposed to the practice of importing medications into the United States.</i>	29%
55%	<i>U.S. pharmaceutical manufacturers currently have a discount prescription card that allows people in need to pay up to 40% less for their medications.</i>	37%
53%	<i>U.S. pharmaceutical manufacturers are strongly opposed to the practice of importing medications into the United States.</i>	36%

How opinion and encouragement shifted...

RESPONDENTS WERE ASKED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SURVEY AND AT THE END OF THE SURVEY IF THEY FAVOR OR OPPOSED THE PRACTICE AND WHETHER OR NOT THEY WOULD ENCOURAGE A FAMILY MEMBER / CLOSE ACQUAINTANCE TO BUY PRESCRIPTIONS FROM CANADA.



Talking Points

- Federal law provides that **only drug manufacturers may reimport their drugs from Canada**. In addition, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration recently wrote that “virtually all drugs imported to the U.S. from Canada by or for individual U.S. consumers also violate U.S. law” because “such drugs are unapproved ... labeled incorrectly ... and/or dispensed without a valid prescription....”
- There is no “personal use exception”** allowing Canadian companies to mail drugs to U.S. consumers. The FDA has said it will not enforce the import prohibition when consumers with deadly diseases import drugs that are not available in the U.S. But this FDA enforcement guidance applies only in extremely limited circumstances where the imported drugs are not advertised in the U.S. and no treatment for the disease is available in the U.S. **This enforcement guidance specifically states that it does not apply to international mail order shipments**, such as those advertised by Internet pharmacies.
- Even the drug imports covered by this FDA enforcement guidance are illegal.** The FDA has explained that “[e]ven if all of the factors noted in the guidance are present, the drugs remain illegal and FDA may decide that such drugs should be refused entry or seized.”

To learn more about this study or the
NACDS Foundation's public opinion
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