A Fragile Nation in Poor Health
Realities About Why So Many Americans Fail to Follow Their Doctor’s Orders
& Strategies For Improving Patient Cooperation
# A Fragile Nation in Poor Health

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About this Study

According to the Department of Health and Human Services, the large majority of Americans (96%) don’t eat their vegetables, and 40% don’t get any exercise. It’s clear Americans have let themselves go. As a result, 67% of Americans are currently overweight or obese, 27% have high blood pressure, and the nation’s population is in a chronic state of poor health. In 2008, 107 million Americans—almost one out of every two adults age 18 or older—had at least one of six commonly reported chronic illnesses: cardiovascular disease, arthritis, diabetes, asthma, cancer, or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Perhaps this is because most Americans aren’t doing all they can to take care of themselves, nor are they getting the support they need from healthcare professionals. This TeleVox Healthy World Report, A Fragile Nation in Poor Health, asks why so many people ignore their doctors’ advice. This study is also designed to test the assumptions many of us make about how physicians interact with their patients, and why so many individuals fail to take the necessary steps to improve their personal health. Additionally, it helps to identify solutions that American adults say would most help them to step up and take control of their personal health.
Why don’t Americans take their doctors’ orders to heart?

New cures or ways of preventing an illness are released to the public on a regular basis, yet about 115 million Americans still don’t feel very healthy. As the findings of this study revealed, one in two (50%) Americans don’t feel their overall personal health is in good shape. In fact, nearly one-quarter (24%) of the U.S. population is, at best, struggling to be healthy.

Despite so many Americans not being in top shape, they aren’t taking the appropriate actions to help themselves feel better. Three out of four Americans (83%) admit they don’t follow treatment plans they’ve been given by their doctor exactly as prescribed.

Healthcare professionals aren’t quite as forgiving. They say 95% of patients fail to follow treatment plans exactly as prescribed. In fact, they only give 1 in 20 patients (5%) an “A” grade for following treatment plans to the letter.

Healthcare professionals aren’t quite as forgiving. They say 95% of patients fail to follow treatment plans exactly as prescribed. In fact, they only give 1 in 20 patients (5%) an “A” grade for following treatment plans to the letter.

According to the National Consumers League, nearly three in four Americans do not follow doctor’s orders for taking prescription drugs, a problem that is associated with 125,000 patient deaths each year. One in three patients never even fills the prescription. Others forget to pick up their drugs from the pharmacy, skip doses, take their pills at the wrong time or take an incorrect dosage. And even for those who follow recommendations at the start, some eventually stop taking their medication altogether.

And, that’s just medicine. Think about how many times doctors tell patients to slim down or change their lifestyle to improve overall health and quality of life. Nobody’s perfect; but it’s surprising how many people fail to change their lifestyle — even after being diagnosed with a serious illness. For example, a 2008 study in the Journal of Clinical Oncology, examined the lifestyles of more than 9,000 cancer survivors and found that only a few had made the switch to a healthful lifestyle. Although most had given up smoking, fewer than 20% were consuming five servings of fruits and vegetables a day and less than half were engaging in regular physical activity. Only 1 out of every 20 survivors was following all three principles of healthful living.

This lack of follow-through by patients exasperates doctors. A Fragile Nation in Poor Health revealed 15%
of healthcare professionals are frustrated because patients don’t follow their treatment plans, and a mere 7% feel they are successfully helping patients become healthier individuals. Although 37% of healthcare providers say their patients acknowledge the situation and have good intentions, many patients make excuses as to why they “can’t” take charge of their personal health.

**Americans aren’t doing all they can to take care of themselves**

3 out of 4 admit they don’t follow their doctor’s treatment exactly as prescribed

1 in 20 get an “A” grade from their doctors for following treatment plans

So, why do millions of Americans fail to follow the treatment plans prescribed by their doctors?

Often, people don’t follow their physician’s instructions because they don’t have adequate information regarding their condition or medication. In many cases, people stop treatment because the side-effects of medication cause more symptoms than the illness. Sometimes people discontinue medications or other forms of treatment as soon as they feel better, assuming they are cured rather than understanding they feel better because the treatment is working. And, some people never begin treatment or stop treatment early because it’s just too expensive.

**Common reasons why millions of Americans fail to follow the treatment plans prescribed by their doctors**

- “Inadequate information regarding their condition or medication”
- “Side-effects of medication cause more symptoms than the illness”
- “Feel better, assuming they are cured rather than understanding they feel better because the treatment is working”
- “Too expensive”

**Lack of follow through by patients exasperates doctors**

37% Healthcare providers who say their patients have good intentions, but make excuses as to why they “can’t” take charge of their personal health.

15% Healthcare professionals who are frustrated because patients don’t follow their treatment plans.

7% Healthcare professionals who feel they are successfully helping patients become healthier individuals.

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3 out of 4 Americans (83%)

Admit they don’t follow treatment plans given by their doctor exactly as prescribed.

This lack of follow through exacerbates doctors; only

7% of healthcare professionals feel they are successfully helping their patients become healthier individuals

Although 37% of healthcare professionals say their patients acknowledge the situation and have good intentions, many patients make excuses as to why they “can’t” take charge of their personal health.
The Doctor’s Dilemma

It’s no secret that primary care doctors are suffering from exhaustion. They often don’t have the time they need to get to know a patient, think about their problem, consult with colleagues, and offer sound advice. According to a study in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, large numbers of physicians claim a lack of control over their work, a hectic work environment, and time constraints during patient visits are negatively impacting their work and the health of their patients. More than a quarter of primary care doctors complained of burnout, and at least 30% indicated they would leave the field within five years.

Their biggest complaint? *Consumer Reports* recently published the results of an online survey of 660 doctors revealing the top complaint to be failure by patients to follow advice or treatment recommendations.

It’s no wonder doctors are overburdened and dissatisfied. Every day they face patients who aren’t accountable for their personal health nor do these patients take proactive steps toward becoming healthier individuals.

The good news: *A Fragile Nation in Poor Health* found healthcare professionals believe with the proper motivation and coaching the majority of their patients (80%) will take necessary steps to do what’s required to become healthy. Patients agree – more than two in five (42%) people who feel they could better follow their prescribed plans would be likely to do so if they received encouragement from their doctors between visits to stay on course. And, more than one-third (35%) of those who think they could improve their routine of following doctors’ instructions believe they would do so if they received reminders from their doctors via email, voicemail or text telling them to do something specific, like take medication or check blood sugar levels.

To achieve success, healthcare providers must engage patients between visits with information that will help them understand the state of their health, their personal role in becoming a healthier person, and regular communications offering encouragement and information that will help them stick with treatment plans between appointments.

Unfortunately, half (50%) of healthcare professionals believe their job begins and ends with assessing the patient’s current state of health, prescribing and explaining treatment plans, and monitoring patient progress during regular office visits. Only one in four (26%) healthcare practitioners believe it’s their job to keep patients on track with their treatment programs between office visits by sending them ongoing reminders and alerts to take medication, check blood sugars, eat right, and exercise.
Patient care between visits makes a difference

Healthcare professionals believe with motivation and coaching 80% their patients will take necessary steps to become healthy.

80%

People who feel they could better follow their prescribed plans would be likely to do so if they received encouragement from their doctors between visits.

42%

Of those who think they could improve their routine of following doctors’ instructions believe they would do so if they received reminders from their doctors telling them to do something specific, like take medication or check blood sugar levels.

35%

It’s not happening... patients aren’t getting the support they need from their doctors

Half of healthcare professionals believe their job begins and ends during regular office visits.

1 in 4 believe it’s their job to keep patients on track between office visits.

55% say they don’t communicate with patients between visits.

2 out of 5 would like to begin providing this level of patient care between visits

Information and encouragement is only part of the job. People have good intentions to become healthier individuals, but they often need a nudge to activate change. A gentle nudge from someone they trust and respect. A kind nudge from someone who cares about their health and is looking out for their best interests. A nudge from their healthcare provider.
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Healthcare professionals believe that with proper motivation and coaching, the majority of their patients will take the necessary steps to become healthy.

- **80%**
- **42%**
- **35%**

Patients agree of people who feel they could better follow their prescribed plans would be likely to do so if they received encouragement from their doctors between visits to stay on course.

Believe they would do so if they received reminders from their doctors via email, voicemail or text telling them to do something specific, like take medicine.

The patient is expected to go it alone. Today, physician support stops at point treatment begins. That needs to change.

To achieve success, healthcare providers must engage patients between visits with information that will help them understand the state of their health, their personal role in becoming a healthier person, and regular communications offering encouragement and information that will help them stick with treatment plans between the home and the doctor’s office.

Patient Actions:
- Check blood sugar
- Exercise
- Take medicine

Encouragement & Alerts:
- Email
- Text
- Voice
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Un fortunately... 
Half of Healthcare professionals believe their job begins and ends with assessing the patient’s current state of health, prescribing and explaining treatment plans, and monitoring patient progress during regular office visits.

And only 1 in 4 (25%) Healthcare professionals believe it’s their job to keep patients on track with their treatment programs between office visits by sending them ongoing reminders and alerts to follow their prescribed treatments.

Information and Encouragement is only part of the job. People have good intentions to become healthier individuals, but they often need a nudge to activate change. A gentle nudge from someone they trust and respect. A kind nudge from someone who cares about their health and is looking out for their best interests. A nudge from their physician.

More than half of healthcare practices say they don’t communicate with patients between visits to provide care. For example, they don’t currently send patients reminders to adhere to treatment plans or follow prescribed exercise routines.

However, two out of five healthcare practices would like to begin providing this level of patient care between visits in the near future.

It’s not enough to prescribe a treatment plan and tell patients during their regular appointments to change their lifestyle.

Healthcare professionals need to activate patients to make positive behavior changes to lead a healthier life. Activation requires ongoing reminders and alerts to follow treatment plans and do exercises as prescribed.
Solving the Problem

This problem exists because there is a gap in our healthcare system. For the most part, patients are expected to “go it alone.” Sure, they go to the doctor who takes a bit of time to review the patient’s current state of health and provide a brief consultation, which typically leads to a prescription for medication and some advice about adopting a healthier lifestyle. The patient then goes to the pharmacy to fill the prescription and that’s where the physician’s support typically ends — at the very point treatment begins. That’s the gaping hole in the system.

Improving the collective health of Americans must be driven by forward-thinking healthcare practitioners who understand their involvement is key to ensuring a healthy future for our world. These doctors and nurses understand that touching the hearts and minds of their patients by engaging with them between office visits will encourage and inspire them to follow and embrace treatment plans. They believe personalized and ongoing patient engagement will activate positive lifestyle changes that will help people of all ages lead healthier lives.

Healthcare professionals are beginning to embrace this interactive approach for treating patients. According to A Fragile Nation in Poor Health, one in four (26%) healthcare practitioners believe it’s their job to keep patients on track with their treatment programs between office visits by sending them ongoing reminders and alerts to take medication, check blood sugars, eat right, and exercise. And, although more than half (55%) of healthcare practices say they don’t currently communicate with patients between visits to provide care, they want to move in this direction. In fact, two out of five healthcare practices (38%) would like to begin providing this level of patient care between visits in the near future.

It’s not enough to prescribe a treatment plan and tell patients during their regular appointments to change their lifestyle. Healthcare professionals need to activate patients to make positive behavior changes for a healthier life. Activation requires ongoing reminders and alerts to take medication, check blood sugars, eat right, and exercise.
Women Take Care of Everyone But Themselves

Women have a tendency to focus on taking care of others before they take care of themselves. Between dropping off and picking up children at school and taking them to and from various extracurricular activities, women typically work, volunteer and manage the household. As if that’s not enough, many women have taken on the responsibility of caring for aging parents or other family members.

It’s no surprise *A Fragile Nation in Poor Health* revealed more than half (53%) of women nationwide say their overall personal health is not in good shape, and one in five women nationwide (20%) say they are struggling to be healthy.

This “all about everyone else” lifestyle is one reason that obesity, smoking and chronic diseases — including depression — are steadily increasing in women.

What about me? It’s something most women think, but few women actually put themselves first. Some are too tired, some simply don’t have time; whatever the reason, women aren’t taking the appropriate actions to help themselves feel better. In fact, when they squeeze in a visit to the doctor, more than 8 out of 10 women (81%) admit they don’t follow treatment plans they’ve been given by their physician exactly as prescribed.

This is particularly alarming because many of the medical conditions that take the lives of women are preventable. Heart disease is by far the number one killer of women in the U.S. The Women’s Heart Foundation reports that 8.6 million women worldwide die from heart disease each year, and that 8 million women in the U.S. are living with heart disease. Of those women who have heart attacks, 42% die within a year.

To prevent heart disease, doctors often tell women to quit smoking, maintain a healthy weight, reduce stress levels, become more physically active, and adopt a healthful diet low in saturated fats and high in soluble fiber.
On the surface, this prescription for improved health seems feasible. Yet, women continue to ignore their doctor’s advice. Perhaps it’s because they are so busy taking care of everyone else they fail to take care of themselves.

What would help?

Arguably, more than anyone, women need support from their physicians to improve and maintain their health. Nearly two in five (39%) women who feel they could better follow their prescribed plans would be likely to do so if they received encouragement from their doctors between visits to stay on course. And, more than one-third (34%) of women would follow instructions better if they received reminders from their doctors via email, voicemail or text telling them to do something specific, like take medication or check blood sugar levels.

Women want doctors who genuinely care about their health, and they need physicians who are attentive, receptive and accessible. They need physicians who check in on them between visits.

Women want to know someone is helping them stick to their treatment plan — whether that’s through emails providing information about their condition and offering encouragement to stay the course, text messages that remind them to take their medication or exercise, or voicemails encouraging them to stick to their healthy diet. It’s these small but meaningful touches between doctor visits that make a big difference to the millions of women across the nation who need to be constantly reminded to take time for themselves and make their personal health a priority.
It’s all too common — a man is short of breath, perhaps he has a little pain in his chest, or feels more tired than usual. Does he run to the doctor? Of course not; he assumes he’s simply out of shape. It’s no secret that men have shorter life spans than women. Perhaps that’s because men take more risks, are reluctant to seek help, and feel pressured to prove they are “tough” by ignoring pain and other signs of illness.

Many men are told from a very young age, “Don’t show weakness.” With that in mind, it makes perfect sense that A Fragile Nation in Poor Health revealed more than half of all men (52%) report being in overall good health, with a mere 4% of men nationwide admitting they are in poor health.

Although men believe they are healthy, the truth is, millions of men across the nation are in denial about the state of their health. According to the CDC, one in four men has some form of heart disease, the leading cause of death in men. Heart failure usually is a chronic condition that gradually gets worse over a long period. And, by the time most men see a doctor about their symptoms, the heart has been “failing,” little by little, for a long time. It’s the “strong silent type” who waits until he experiences obvious symptoms of heart failure before seeing a doctor. By then, however, the condition may already be life-threatening.

And, when men get bad news from their doctor, they are apt to overcompensate in the other areas of their lives that enhance their self-esteem. For example, they may throw themselves into work because positive feedback from employers and colleagues who recognize their accomplishments makes them feel better. However, working long hours and not getting enough exercise only exacerbate the problem. In fact, experts warn that unfit men who work long hours double their risk of dying from heart disease.

To make matters worse, A Fragile Nation in Poor Health found that when men do finally go to the doctor, more than four in five (84%) admit they don’t follow treatment plans they’ve been given by their physician exactly as prescribed. Many men simply do not like being told what to do. When treatment plans aren’t presented properly, men have a tendency to rebel. It makes them feel like they are in control.
So, how can physicians motivate men to follow treatment plans and take control of their health? One universal truth about men is that they are “pleasers.” When they are able to please, they feel like winners. However, if men continually come up against a physician who tells them they aren’t doing enough, they will eventually quit trying to satisfy and will rebel.

Men thrive on appreciation for their accomplishments — big and small. They don’t want doctors who try to fix their health problems, rather they prefer physicians who support them along the way and boost their confidence.

*A Fragile Nation in Poor Health* revealed nearly half (46%) of men who feel they could better follow their prescribed plans would be likely to do so if they received encouragement from their doctors between visits to stay on course. And, more than one-third (35%) of men would follow instructions better if they received reminders from their doctors via email, voicemail or text telling them to do something specific, like take medication or go to the gym.

Men who feel they could better follow their prescribed plans would be likely to do so if they received encouragement from their doctors between visits to stay on course.

Men who would follow instructions better if they received reminders from their doctors telling them to do something specific, like take medication or go to the gym.

Honest communication is top priority for men. They don’t want to read their physician’s mind or try to interpret vague information. Instead, they want doctors who answer questions honestly and volunteer information. They want physicians who are straightforward and tell it like it is, while communicating with kindness and without criticism. Bear in mind, doctors need to preserve the dignity of their male patients, so they need to be careful about appearing judgmental. And, whenever possible, they should focus on what male patients are doing right!
Health Check: Gen Y

Stress and obesity are the two biggest health problems plaguing Generation Y, largely because they were born into a world that makes it easy to become overweight and obese. They’ve been sitting in front of computers and playing video games since they were children. They’ve grown up on a steady diet of sugary drinks, processed and fast foods. In addition, their childhood, filled with planned activities, has extended into their adult lives, and they are very busy and over taxed. Moreover, longer working hours and fewer opportunities for physical activity in the workplace feed the cycle of stress and poor health habits.

A Fragile Nation in Poor Health revealed 4 out of 10 (42%) Gen Y Americans do not feel their overall personal health is in good shape. Part of the problem is they tend to wait until a health issue becomes severe, rather than see their primary care physician when symptoms first appear.

When it comes to following their doctor’s advice, more than four in five (83%) Gen Y Americans admit they don’t follow treatment plans exactly as prescribed. Often after receiving a diagnosis, they turn to the Internet to find more information on the condition. As a result, they are knowledgeable and want to take a very strong role in shaping their course of treatment. Gen Y takes a very hands-on approach to health care and if doctors don’t work with these patients to design customized treatment plans, Gen Y Americans may disregard treatment advice.

Generation Y has high expectations of doctors and they require a cooperative approach throughout their treatment in order to lead a healthy adult life. In fact, the study shows that nearly half (47%) Gen Y Americans, who feel they could better follow their prescribed plans, would be likely to do so if they received encouragement from their doctors between visits to stay on course.

Gen Y patients, who have grown up in a society of instant information, want quick solutions to their problems. They expect fast treatment or a “quick cure” for their medical problems, which leads to frustration when they have chronic ailments like stress and weight problems.

42% Gen Y patients who do not feel their overall personal health is in good shape.

45% Gen Y patients who would follow instructions better if they received reminders from their doctors telling them to do something specific, like take medication or exercise.
And, close to one in two (45%) of Gen Y Americans would follow instructions better if they received reminders from their doctors via email, voicemail or text telling them to do something specific, like take medication or exercise.

For Gen Y, face-to-face contact is just one option for engaging with doctors. This generation of patients is far more comfortable with the idea of “virtual” patient interactions involving calls, e-mails, text messages and social media. Additionally, they will require physicians to accommodate their expectations of easy access, while providing them with personalized care between doctor appointments.

Gen Y patients...

- Are among the most informed and assertive generation of patients
- Grew up with the Internet, e-mail and text messaging
- Require doctors to use technology to communicate
- Expect to collaborate with doctors in the development of treatment plans
- Assume “quick cures” are the norm and become easily frustrated with chronic ailments
- Comfortable with the idea of “virtual” doctor’s visits

83% Gen Y patients who admit they don’t follow treatment plans exactly as prescribed.

47% Gen Y patients who feel they could better follow their prescribed plans would be likely to do so if they received encouragement from their doctors between visits.

Gen Y patients who admit they don’t follow treatment plans exactly as prescribed.

Gen Y patients who feel they could better follow their prescribed plans would be likely to do so if they received encouragement from their doctors between visits.
Health Check: Gen X

Generation X was pushed toward adulthood at an early age — they are the latchkey generation. Gen Xers learned independence early in life as they often found themselves home alone while their parents worked. While they were fending for themselves, microwaving was considered cooking and TV dinners were the norm. Unfortunately, processed foods continue to be a staple for Gen X Americans. As a result, they are more prone to obesity, which puts them at a higher risk for diabetes. It’s no wonder diabetes is one of the worst diseases facing Generation X.

A Fragile Nation in Poor Health revealed that half (50%) of Gen X Americans feel their overall personal health is in good shape. A mere 3% of the people in this age group admit they are in poor health. That’s not surprising considering Generation X is just coming to the age where more and more health concerns begin to present. However, many serious diseases, such as diabetes, begin with almost no visible symptoms, meaning this age group may have a false sense of health. As we age, for example, our risk of developing diabetes increases. In fact, according to the American Diabetes Association, 76 million Americans are pre-diabetic right now.

Autonomy and self-reliance are natural by-products of the Generation X childhood. Their independence, however, sometimes gets in the way of their health. For example, they tend to delay going to the doctor or getting necessary treatment because they fear being viewed as needy.

Considering Generation X is said to be the defiant demographic, it’s no surprise to find that when they do visit the doctor, nearly 9 in 10 Gen X Americans (87%) admit they don’t follow treatment plans they’ve been given by their physician exactly as prescribed. They prefer to do things their own way.

This age group, however, is extremely practical. With that in mind, nearly two in five (37%) Generation X Americans, who feel they could better follow their prescribed plans, would be likely to do so if they received encouragement from their doctors between visits to stay on course.
Generation X tends to be focused on current realities rather than future promises. Due to their pragmatic tendencies, they want to reduce risk in life. Therefore, they should be encouraged to schedule wellness visits, get health screenings, and adopt a healthy lifestyle. When it comes to treatments, Generation X wants to learn all they can about a procedure before committing to it. They prefer to enter health situations feeling as if they are in control, with a reasonable idea of what to expect.

Bear in mind, Gen Xers want to be looked at as individuals. Perhaps as a result of their latchkey childhood, they are not used to being closely supervised and are remarkably good at working on their own. On the other hand, members of Generation X can never get enough feedback on their performance. They want to know how they are doing and they want recognition for their accomplishments.

A Fragile Nation in Poor Health revealed more than 4 in 10 (42%) Gen X Americans would follow instructions better if they received reminders from their doctors via email, voicemail or text telling them to do something specific, like schedule a routine health screening, or grab a piece of fruit before hitting the gym.

Because technology is the norm for this group, they will expect to receive information and to converse in this way. They thrive on interactive, electronic communication. A personalized approach that offers feedback on their progress, along with recognition for the accomplishments they make along the way, and the space they need to achieve their health-related goals independently, will go a long way to keep this generation motivated to stay the course and become healthier individuals.

- Are self-reliant and used to fending for themselves
- Are just arriving at an age where more health concerns begin to present
- Prefer to do things their own way
- Are extremely practical
- Desire feedback on progress, recognition for accomplishments
Health Check: Baby Boomers

Baby boomers think of themselves as “forever young,” and numerous studies confirm they have an unwavering determination not to get old. Despite their quest for the fountain of youth, the oldest members of the baby boomers are now turning 65 and, by 2030, the number of Americans over 65 is expected to double, reaching 72 million, according to the Census Bureau.

As boomers march into old age, they’re developing health problems. A Fragile Nation in Poor Health revealed more than half (56%) of American baby boomers do not feel their overall personal health is in good shape, and one in four (26%) say they’re struggling to be healthy. This is in large part because millions of baby boomers are overweight and inactive, which leads to an increase in chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes. Excess weight also puts extra wear and tear on the body’s muscles and joints, making it more difficult for boomers to do things they used to take for granted like climb stairs, get up from a chair, or lift their arms over their heads.

Despite so many American baby boomers not being in top shape, they aren’t taking the appropriate actions to help themselves feel better. Eight in 10 American baby boomers (80%) admit they don’t follow treatment plans they’ve been given by their doctor exactly as prescribed. Given that the average adult over age 55 juggles six to eight medications daily, it’s no wonder baby boomers have problems following their treatment plans. Managing multiple chronic diseases makes it tough to recall which medications treat which ailments. And, with overflowing pill boxes, it’s difficult to remember when to take each pill, whether to take the various medications with or without food and water, or recollect if taking two pills a day means two at the same time – or one pill in the morning and one pill at night.

About 50% of the two billion prescriptions filled each year are not taken correctly. Unfortunately, failure to take drugs on time in the dosages prescribed is a serious problem with potentially tragic consequences. It’s estimated that 125,000 people with treatable ailments die each year simply because they do not take prescribed medications properly or they skip them altogether.
Baby boomers have been redefining the world at every stage of their lives. With boomers going to the doctor in droves, and limited doctors and nurses available to care for them, there’s no doubt boomers will redefine the way physicians interact with patients.

Bear in mind, boomers want to have choices and be involved. They don’t mind demanding a little attention, and they like to be pampered. And, these expectations extend to their relationships with their doctors. *A Fragile Nation in Poor Health* revealed that more than a quarter (25%) of American baby boomers, who feel they could better follow their prescribed plans, would be likely to do so if they received encouragement from their doctors between visits to stay on course. And, more than 1 in 10 (13%) said they would follow instructions better if they received reminders from their doctors via email, voicemail or text telling them to do something specific, like take medication or check blood sugar levels.

To accommodate boomers, physicians will need to adopt technologies that enable them to provide care between visits. Not only will this personal approach help physicians deliver care in a way that continuously motivates boomers to be healthy, but it could also cut down on unnecessary visits to the doctor’s office and emergency room. Many medical issues don’t require an office visit and can be managed through other channels of communication.

To prepare for the onslaught of chronically ill baby boomers, physicians must reinvent the way they interact with patients.

- Baby boomers think of themselves as “forever young”
- Millions of baby boomers are overweight and inactive
- The average adult over age 55 juggles six to eight medications daily
- About 50% of the two billion prescriptions filled each year are not taken correctly
- 125,000 people with treatable ailments die each year simply because they do not take prescribed medications properly or they skip them altogether
 Married with Children: 
Life in the Fast Lane

Happy marriages are profoundly connected to good health and well-being. Considering 33% of marriages across America fall into this category of “successful, stable and healthy,” the findings of A Fragile Nation in Poor Health ring true. The study revealed half (50%) of married people across the nation say they are in overall good health, and only 4% of married people in America report being in poor health.

Various studies show married people tend to live longer, healthier lives. For instance, married people are less likely to get pneumonia, have surgery, develop cancer or have heart attacks.

However, when happily married couples add kids to the mix, the pressure to be model parents with perfect kids adds significant stress to the lives of couples, and has telling impacts on their overall health.

A Fragile Nation in Poor Health revealed more than two in five (46%) parents across the nation say their overall personal health is not in good shape. The constant bustle of school activities, homework, sports, music lessons, birthday parties and other social events takes its toll.

Two words can describe most parents: stressed and tired. When parents aren’t working, taking care of the house, or taking kids from one activity to another, they don’t have time or energy to care for themselves. That means they have a hard time squeezing in exercise and they tend to eat whatever is easiest and quickest. The bottom line is an over-scheduled life leads to weight gain as well as increased rates of stress, anxiety and physical ailments such as headaches, stomach upsets or backaches, skin rashes, recurring colds or flu, or muscle spasms.

Unfortunately, due to their demanding schedules, parents often delay going to the doctor until they get sick or reach a breaking point. And, when they do go to the doctor, they are often seeking a quick fix so they can get better and back to their busy lives.

With this in mind, parents are guilty of ignoring doctor’s orders. In fact, A Fragile Nation in Poor Health revealed 8 in 10 parents (78%) admit they don’t follow treatment plans they’ve been given by their doctor exactly as prescribed.
Many parents lose sight of the fact that they are better able to keep up when they are in good health. The good news is, more than one-third (38%) of parents, who feel they could better follow their prescribed plans, would be likely to do so if they received encouragement from their doctors between visits to stay on course. And, more than two in five (42%) parents would follow instructions better if they received reminders from their doctors via email, voicemail or text telling them to do something specific, like take medication, prepare a healthy meal, take a walk, or a simple reminder “to take time for yourself today.”

Parents are used to self-sacrificing, so they need physicians who remind them that devoting time and effort to being healthier will enable them to be better partners, parents and friends. They also want doctors who help them learn to recognize the symptoms of too much stress, along with some new ways to cope with the myriad of problems they are dealing with every day. They would also be grateful for a physician who simply gave them permission to make time for themselves — to reserve time each week for their own activities. Perhaps there should be a doctor’s note for that!
Unemployment is Making Americans Sick

The high unemployment rate and lack of jobs is taking its toll on the health of Americans nationwide. *A Fragile Nation in Poor Health* revealed the nation’s unemployed report being significantly less healthy than working Americans. Three in five (59%) people who are out of work say their overall personal health is lacking, with more than one-quarter of unemployed Americans saying they are struggling with their health. Conversely, nearly 60% of people who are gainfully employed feel good about the state of their personal health.

These findings are validated by Harvard research, which shows that when people lose jobs through no fault of their own, they are twice as likely to report developing a new ailment like high blood pressure, diabetes or heart disease over the next year and a half, compared to people who are continuously employed.

More and more people are competing for fewer and fewer jobs. This dynamic puts an immense amount of stress on the unemployed as they fight to stay afloat while they are out of work. And, with stress comes illness. Unfortunately, without a job, people often can’t afford health insurance or have trouble getting insured. So with money tight and no insurance, people are forced to make sacrifices with their health they wouldn’t normally make.

The findings of *A Fragile Nation in Poor Health* found people who are out of work are not taking care of themselves. More than four in five unemployed adults (81%) admit they don’t follow treatment plans they’ve been given by their doctor exactly as prescribed. For example, they may not fill their prescriptions or try to take “half-dosages” to conserve money, especially if they don’t have insurance.

Depression is one of the first health problems to strike when unemployment hits, and depression frequently leads to weight gain. When people don’t feel needed, or when they feel they are letting themselves or others down, they become depressed. Often doctors prescribe antidepressant medication to help patients get out of their funk. However, if patients are not filling prescriptions because money is tight, the treatment won’t help. With that in mind, patients need to be forthcoming with their...
doctors. If they don’t plan to, or can’t afford to, fill a prescription, they need to let their doctors know so an alternate form of treatment can be prescribed.

Exercise, for instance, is free. Duke University research found that adults suffering from depression who participated in an aerobic-exercise plan improved as much as those treated with medication. However, prescribing exercise as a treatment option and having patients actually exercise are two different things. After all, it’s hard for people who are depressed to get motivated to exercise. What’s a doctor to do?

*A Fragile Nation in Poor Health* revealed that more than two in five (41%) out of work adults, who feel they could better follow their prescribed plans, would be likely to do so if they received encouragement from their doctors between visits to stay on course. And, more than one in four (27%) unemployed adults would follow instructions better if they received reminders from their doctors via email, voicemail or text telling them to do something specific, like take medication or take a walk.

With high numbers of unemployed people across the nation, it’s important for doctors to remember these people frequently feel isolated and alone. A supportive physician who interacts with patients between visits can make a big difference in helping these patients maintain their health so they can get back on their feet.

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**Unemployed Americans who admit they don’t follow treatment plans exactly as prescribed. For example, they may not fill their prescriptions or try to take “half-dosages” to conserve money.**

81%

**The nation’s unemployed who feel they could better follow their prescribed plans would be likely to do so if they received encouragement from their doctors between visits.**

41%

**The nation’s unemployed who would follow instructions better if they received reminders from their doctors telling them to do something specific, like take medication or take a walk.**

27%

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1. The number of unemployed persons, at 14.0 million, was essentially unchanged in August, and the unemployment rate held at 9.1 percent. The rate has shown little change since April, according to the Employment Situation Summary released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics on Sept. 2, 2011.
The South

Although the South is known for its hospitality, there’s really no polite way to say this, but, the collective health of the region is “Going South.” Unfortunately, A Fragile Nation in Poor Health revealed millions of people living in the South are in denial about the state of their personal health. Only 1 in 20 people (5%) in the southern states admit they are in poor health. Surprisingly, more than half (53%) of Americans living in the South consider themselves to be healthy or very healthy.

However, according to the annual Unhealthiest States ranking, the states with the least healthy behaviors are primarily located in the South; the worst were Kentucky, Louisiana, Alabama and Arkansas, with Mississippi coming in dead last for the tenth consecutive year. In general, the residents of southern states are more likely to be smokers or obese, and Mississippi has a sky-high death rate from heart disease.1

Additionally, this section of the country has been coined, “The Diabetes Belt” because researchers from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have discovered that a wide swath across mostly southern U.S. states has diabetes rates above 11%, compared to 8.5% for the rest of the country. Widespread diabetes in the South is linked to the region’s high prevalence of obesity and lack of exercise. According to the CDC, Americans living in the South are the least active, and they don’t spend enough time exercising.

Despite the fact that so many Americans residing in the southern states are in declining health, they aren’t taking the appropriate actions to become healthier. In fact, A

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Fragile Nation in Poor Health revealed more than 8 out of 10 Americans residing in the southern states (82%) admit they don’t follow treatment plans they’ve been given by their doctor exactly as prescribed.

However, nearly half (46%) of those who feel they could better follow their prescribed plans would be likely to do
so if they received encouragement from their doctors between visits to stay on course. And, more than one-third (34%) of people living in the South would follow instructions better if they received reminders from their doctors via email, voicemail or text telling them to do something specific, like take medication or check blood sugar levels.

One of the best ways Southerners can improve their health is to adopt healthier eating habits. People in the South have deep relationships with food as evidenced by popular sayings such as, “Food is Love” and “If it ain’t fried it ain’t cooked.” Southern culinary favorites include grits, soul food, and Memphis style barbecue. Many of the most popular American soft drinks including Coca-Cola, Pepsi-Cola, Mountain Dew and Dr. Pepper originated in the South.

Southerners need physicians to truly partner with them to adopt healthier lifestyles. This is a proud bunch down South; so a soft touch, along with ongoing education will go a long way toward helping them adopt healthier habits.

- The Southern United States has been coined, “The Diabetes Belt”
- Widespread diabetes in the South is linked to the region’s high prevalence of obesity and lack of exercise
- Americans living in the South are the least active
- People in the South have deep relationships with food as evidenced by popular sayings such as, “Food is Love” and “If it ain’t fried it ain’t cooked”
People living in the Western region of the United States tend to get high marks for health. In general, they are considered among the most active and health-conscious of all Americans. And, for the most part, Westerners agree with that sentiment. *A Fragile Nation in Poor Health* revealed 49% of Americans residing in the western states consider themselves to be healthy or very healthy, with an additional 25% striving to become healthier.

However, when Westerners do go to the doctor, nearly nine in ten of them (87%) admit they don’t follow treatment plans they’ve been given by their doctor exactly as prescribed, *A Fragile Nation in Poor Health* revealed. People aren’t perfect—they don’t take their medication, they struggle to eat right and exercise. However, nearly two in five (38%) people living in the western states, who feel they could better follow their prescribed plans, would be likely to do so if they received encouragement from their doctors between visits to stay on course. And, one in three (32%) said they would follow instructions better if they received reminders from their doctors via email, voicemail or text telling them to do something specific, like take medication, take a walk, or check blood sugar levels.

Westerners need some encouragement to go to the doctor. They also require some education about how their current lifestyles impact future health risks, so they can make changes today to keep serious illnesses at bay.

- The biggest risk facing people living in the Western U.S. is “the illusion of health”.
- Westerners need some encouragement to go to the doctor.
- They require education about how their current lifestyles impact future health risks.

The biggest risk facing people in this region of the country is “the illusion of health.” When people feel good they neglect wellness visits. In fact, they typically wait until they have obvious symptoms of an illness before they go to the doctor, which is precisely how a manageable disease becomes life-threatening.
Westerners who are striving to become healthier.

Westerners who admit they don’t follow treatment plans exactly as prescribed.

Americans residing in the western states who feel they could better follow their prescribed plans would be likely to do so if they received encouragement from their doctors between visits to stay on course.

Westerners who would follow instructions better if they received reminders from their doctors telling them to do something specific, like take medication, take a walk, or check blood sugar levels.

**49%** Westerners who consider themselves to be healthy or very healthy.

**25%** Westerners who are striving to become healthier.

**87%** Westerners who admit they don’t follow treatment plans exactly as prescribed.

**38%** Americans residing in the western states who feel they could better follow their prescribed plans would be likely to do so if they received encouragement from their doctors between visits to stay on course.

**32%** Westerners who would follow instructions better if they received reminders from their doctors telling them to do something specific, like take medication, take a walk, or check blood sugar levels.
Midwesterners’ waistlines are expanding, in part because they eat a lot of bread and pastries. In fact, this region of the country is known as the nation’s “breadbasket,” with favorites that include wheat and honey buns, kolaches, homemade pie, and traditional breads of all kinds. The Midwestern diet is also filled with comfort foods such as casseroles, steaks, hamburgers, fried chicken, and pot roast.

It may not be due to lack of trying, however. In fact, Midwesterners are known for working hard and, if at first they don’t succeed, they “try and try again.” Perhaps one of the reasons they struggle to become healthy is because they are working hard doing all of the wrong things.

According to A Fragile Nation in Poor Health, four in five Americans residing in the Midwest (82%) admit they don’t follow treatment plans they’ve been given by their doctor exactly as prescribed.

Considering this, Midwestern doctors need to be specific in defining the actions their patients must take to become healthier. And, they must provide their patients with support between doctor visits to help them overcome obstacles. Midwesterners also require ongoing feedback from their physicians to better understand how their day-to-day actions are impacting their ability to improve their health.

Midwesterners agree. A Fragile Nation in Poor Health revealed more than one-third (39%) of people living in the Midwest, who feel they could better follow their prescribed plans, would be likely to do so if they received encouragement from their doctors between visits to stay...
on course. And, more than one in three (38%) said they would follow instructions better if they received reminders from their doctors via email, voicemail or text telling them to do something specific, like take medication or check blood sugar levels.

Midwesterners are motivated by a sense of accomplishment and progress. Therefore, it’s important for Midwestern doctors take an active role in supporting patients between office visits with information and reminders that are specific to each patient’s treatment plan, along with feedback that enables them to achieve better health.

- The Midwestern diet is filled with high fat, high calorie comfort foods.
- The Midwest has extremely high rates of obesity.

**Midwesterners …**

- Are motivated by a sense of accomplishment and progress.
- Work hard and, if at first they don’t succeed, they “try and try again.”
- Require ongoing feedback from their physicians to better understand how their day-to-day actions are impacting their ability to improve their health.

- **39%** Midwesterners who feel they could better follow their prescribed plans would be likely to do so if they received encouragement from their doctors between visits to stay on course.

- **38%** Midwesterners who would follow instructions better if they received reminders from their doctors telling them to do something specific, like take medication or check blood sugar levels.
The Northeast

Northeasterners are healthy and they know it. *A Fragile Nation in Poor Health* revealed that 57% of Americans living in the northeastern states consider themselves to be healthy or very healthy, with another 24% striving to become healthy. A mere 16% say becoming healthy is a struggle.

Northeasterners tend to have some of the healthiest habits in the nation. Research shows they smoke less, exercise more, and weigh less than people living in other parts of the country. In fact, New England sets a benchmark for the country with all six of the New England states among the nation’s 10 healthiest.¹ And, in 2010, Vermont was ranked the healthiest state in America.

Perhaps it’s because people living in the Northeast spend more time outdoors. Planning and participating in physical leisure activities — whether it’s hiking, walking or cycling — are simply more commonplace in the Northeast. Additionally, public transit systems are the norm in this part of the country, which means people spend more time walking (rather than driving) as part of their daily lives.

It’s not all sunshine and roses, however. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, cancer strikes more people living in the Northeast region of the United States than it does people living in any other part of the country. The most prevalent cancers for this area are breast cancer, prostate cancer and colorectal cancer.

Unfortunately, cancer doesn’t typically display obvious symptoms until the disease has advanced to a pretty serious stage. So, Northeasterners tend to have a “feel good” mentality that delays doctor visits.

And, even when they do go to the doctor, 8 out of 10 (80%) Americans residing in the Northeast admit they don’t follow treatment plans they’ve been given by their doctor exactly as prescribed, *A Fragile Nation in Poor Health* revealed. Perhaps they disregard advice from their doctors because they feel so healthy.

By following their doctor’s advice, however, people will stay healthy longer while preventing and better managing serious diseases — such as cancer. Unfortunately, many people think they are already fit and healthy, so why spend time trying to fix something that isn’t broken?

This trend demonstrates the challenges healthcare
Northeastern states have the most doctors per capita
Northeasterners smoke less, exercise more, and weigh less than people living in other parts of the country
New England sets a benchmark for the country with all six of the New England states among the nation’s 10 healthiest
Cancer strikes more people living in the Northeast region of the United States than it does people living in any other part of the country
The most prevalent cancers for this area are breast cancer, prostate cancer and colorectal cancer

80%
Northeasterners who admit they don’t follow treatment plans exactly as prescribed.

43%
Americans living in the northeastern states who feel they could better follow their prescribed plans, would be likely to do so if they received encouragement from their doctors between visits.

35%
Northeasterners who would follow instructions better if they received reminders from their doctors telling them to do something specific, like take medication, schedule a routine medical screening, or get a flu shot.

People need doctors who are willing to build relationships with their patients by engaging them between visits with information, reminders and feedback. When it comes to partnering for better health, though, too many doctors put the burden on the patient to be proactive, ask questions, and build the relationship. The good news for Northeasterners is they can be choosy. Northeastern states have the most doctors per capita, giving residents a vast number of doctors to select from. With this in mind, Northeasterners need to actively seek doctors who are known for collaborating with patients between visits, and who participate in the day-to-day health of their patients.

1. The United Health Foundation Full Ranking: America’s Healthiest And Unhealthiest States, Forbes, 12/10
Creating a Healthy World

No matter your age or gender, preventive action will not only improve patient outcomes and reduce healthcare costs, but it will also improve quality of life and save lives. Patients want to be involved in their own care, but need the tools to stay educated, encouraged and motivated to follow through for their own health. Text messages, phone calls and emails from physicians get patients’ attention while providing this desired support and involvement.

Increasing patient communication efforts will require forward-thinking healthcare practitioners who understand that their continued involvement is critical to ensuring a healthy future for our patients. Many physicians understand that engaging patients between office visits can inspire them to embrace and build the habits to follow through with treatment plans. They know personalized, ongoing engagement can activate positive lifestyle changes that will help people lead healthy lives.
About Healthy World

A healthy world, while global by definition, actually happens one person at a time. It is driven by forward-thinking healthcare practitioners who understand their involvement is critical to ensuring a healthy population.

The Healthy World initiative, launched by TeleVox, aims at helping people — young and old — be healthy!

Three imperatives for creating a healthy world — one person at a time

1. Touch the hearts and minds of patients to drive positive behavior change.
2. Engage patients with information and encouragement between visits.
3. Activate patients to make positive behavior changes for a healthier life.

The driving force behind the goal of creating a healthy world are the healthcare professionals who take the time to engage patients with personalized, thoughtful, ongoing communications that encourage and inspire them to embrace and follow ongoing treatment plans.

They know every communication with a patient — including those that take place between office visits — is an opportunity to help that person understand the importance of good habits like nutrition, physical activity, taking their medications as prescribed and following new treatment recommendations. Engaging patients and their families between visits through proactive, relevant communications helps them to wake up and stay focused on positive behavior changes is the way to create a healthy world — one patient at a time.
About TeleVox

TeleVox is a high-tech Engagement Communications company, providing automated voice, email, text and web solutions that activate positive patient behaviors through the delivery of technology with a human touch.

Since 1992, TeleVox has been creating a comprehensive approach that breaks through and motivates people to live healthy lives. At TeleVox, we understand that touching the hearts and minds of patients by engaging with them between healthcare appointments will encourage and inspire them to follow and embrace treatment plans. We know personalized, ongoing patient engagement will activate positive lifestyle changes. TeleVox helps healthcare professionals touch, engage and activate every unique patient to lead healthy lives.

TeleVox. High-tech, human touch to create a healthy world — one patient at a time.
Our Healthy World Initiative utilizes ethnographic research to uncover, understand and interpret the patient point-of-view when it comes to managing their health. We focus on studying how people interact with healthcare providers and how they behave between doctor visits. As part of this program, TeleVox delivers research reports that provide healthcare professionals with timely insight for helping patients make healthy changes in their lives, follow treatment plans, and take accountability for improving their personal health.