



TRICARE Telephonic Customer Support

CONTENTS

Table with 2 columns: Section Name and Page. Includes Executive Summary (1), Overview (Introduction 2, Background 2, Purpose 3), Method (Survey Administration 3, Response Rate 3, Respondent Demographics 3), Results (Types of Information Sought 4, Information Sources 4, Customer Service Interactions 7, Healthcare Advice Services 11), and Next Steps (15).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This survey was undertaken to further explore apparent customer difficulty using TRICARE telephone call centers identified in a February 2004 nationwide telephone survey.

Appointments.

- At the time of this survey, the direct care system was transitioning from regional contractor to local appointing services. Of those using primarily military sources of care, 88% indicated they had made an appointment by phone during the past year via their local military clinic while only 39% had done so via one of the TRICARE support contractors.
This was most frequently cited as the reason for their most recent call for TRICARE information.
'Getting through' did not seem to be as much of a problem for appointments as for other information needs, particularly for MTF users.

Claims for Reimbursement.

- Although most members had not inquired about a claim in the past year, those who had were most likely to call the regional contractor regarding claims issues.
This was cited as the reason for the most recent call by 25% of those using primarily civilian treatment facilities, but by only 5% of those using primarily military facilities.
Users of civilian sources of care in the West region seemed to have much more of a problem in identifying who to call, than in the other CONUS regions.

TRICARE Eligibility.

- About 40% of members had made calls regarding eligibility, most frequently to the regional contractor or the TRICARE Information Service (TIS). Although the TIS provides only general

eligibility information, it was more commonly called than installation personnel offices or the DMDC 800 number. This may warrant beneficiary education effort to avoid unnecessary calls.

Finding a Provider.

- Approximately half of members had made such a call, most frequently to the regional contractor.
- 31% of respondents rated identifying the appropriate source and the proper number to call as “very difficult.” This seemed to be a problem among all three CONUS regions, but not a problem overseas.
- Most civilian care users indicated “getting through” was problematic, and this problem seemed to be greatest in the West and South regions.
- The majority of respondents (55%) indicated the quality of information received was problematic. This was not the case for those living overseas.

General Benefit Information.

- Slightly more than half had made such a call, with most going to the regional contractor.
- This was the second most frequently cited recent call for TRICARE information, and was cited as most recent by 32% of users of civilian care sources, and only 19% of MTF users.
- Users of MTFs seemed to have greater difficulty in determining who to call, and this also seemed to be a greater problem in the West region.
- “Getting through” was not an issue for MTF users, though it was problematic for 38% of civilian care users within CONUS.

Courtesy.

- 13% (18 of 143) respondents rated the customer service agent in their most recent phone call as “discourteous. Overseas and the South region customer service agents were much less frequently cited as being discourteous.

Healthcare Advice Services.

- 56% of respondents indicated they had sought general medical treatment advice within the past year, with most calling their clinic, followed by Web sources, followed by about 11% who said they had used the TRICARE HCIL.
- Consistent with the February 2004 nationwide telephone survey, all three of these sources were cited as significantly easier to use than other TRICARE telephone call centers.
- Although the number of respondents was quite small (8), Web sources seemed more effective than either calls to the clinic or calls to the HCIL in addressing concerns to an extent that the member did not seek routine or immediate medical attention.

OVERVIEW

Introduction

TRICARE provides telephonic customer support through a combination of government and contractor customer service agencies who have either global, national, regional or local geographic responsibility. These call centers have distinct responsibilities to include either eligibility, pharmacy services, dental services, claims processing, appointing, medical advice or health plan benefit counseling. This survey was undertaken to explore the utilization and effectiveness of TRICARE’s telephonic customer support system.

Background

TMA accomplished a nationwide telephone survey of 4,170 recent TRICARE users in February 2004. That survey found awareness of TRICARE toll-free call centers as an information source is exceptionally high (91.3%) and constituted the most frequently mentioned information source when compared with printed materials, MTF staff, and TRICARE Web sites. However, of over 20 information sources mentioned as difficult to use, call centers were more than twice as frequently cited (29.1%) as any other

source, and the difficulty of use was rated highest by the two groups (spouses of active duty and spouses of activated reservists) who showed the highest level of health care information seeking behavior.

Purpose

The present Delphi survey was undertaken to identify specific components of the difficulty experienced in using TRICARE call centers by more specifically identifying the types of call centers used, and customer experiences with each type. We anticipate information gathered from this survey will assist in informing a follow-up nationwide telephone study of telephone call center customer support to be conducted within the next few months.

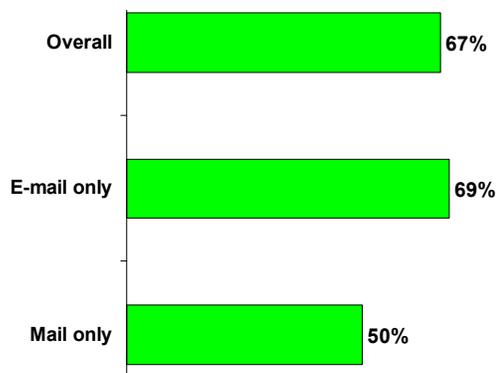
METHOD

Survey Administration

Hard copy evaluations were sent on 14 September 2004 to 30 council members who previously requested mail communication. A Web-link was E-mailed on 20 September to the remaining 268 council members. A reminder E-mail was sent to non-responders on 28 September, but no mail follow-up was done.

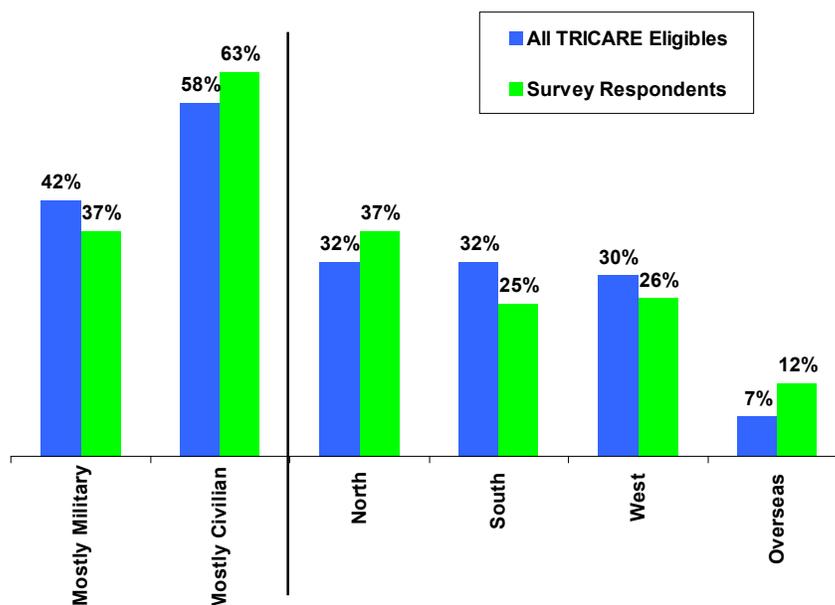
Response Rate

As of 30 September, 199 responses were received, including 15 via mail and 184 via the Web for an overall response rate of 67 percent. This response rate is down 5 percent from the previous survey, The Next TRICARE Handbook.



Respondent Demographics

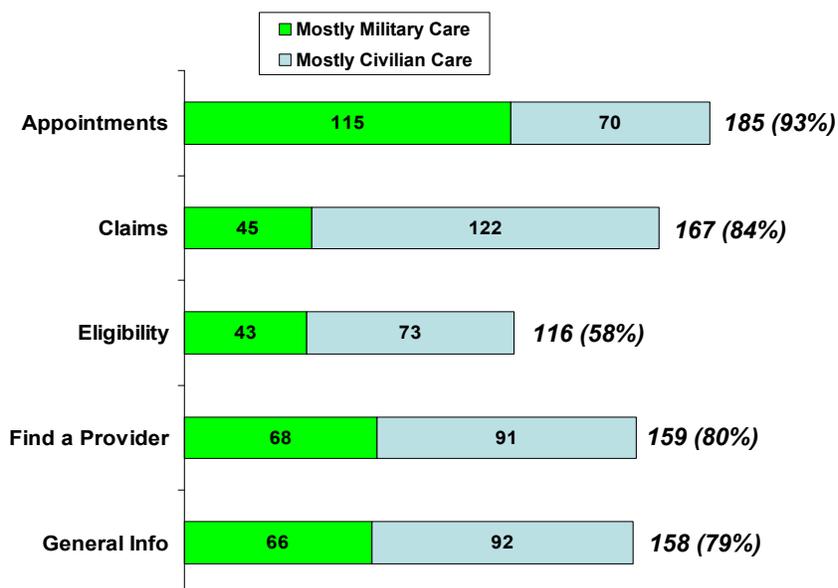
The Delphi Council includes a broad cross-section of volunteer TRICARE beneficiaries from all military Services, and all benefit options. Two demographic parameters particularly relevant to this study of telephone support were whether respondents use primarily the direct care system (military care) vice the purchased care system (civilian care), and which TRICARE region they live in. As shown in the graph below, compared with all 9.1 million TRICARE eligible beneficiaries, the 199 survey respondents are somewhat over representative of the purchased care system, and of the North and Overseas TRICARE Regions. All results shown in this study are unweighted and are uncorrected for these disparities.



RESULTS

Types of Information Sought

Council members were provided five general phone information categories and asked whether they had used any of those sources during the past year. 188 of 199 respondents (94%) had made at least one phone call for TRICARE information within the past year. The frequency each type of call was cited is shown in the adjacent chart, with appointments being most commonly cited.

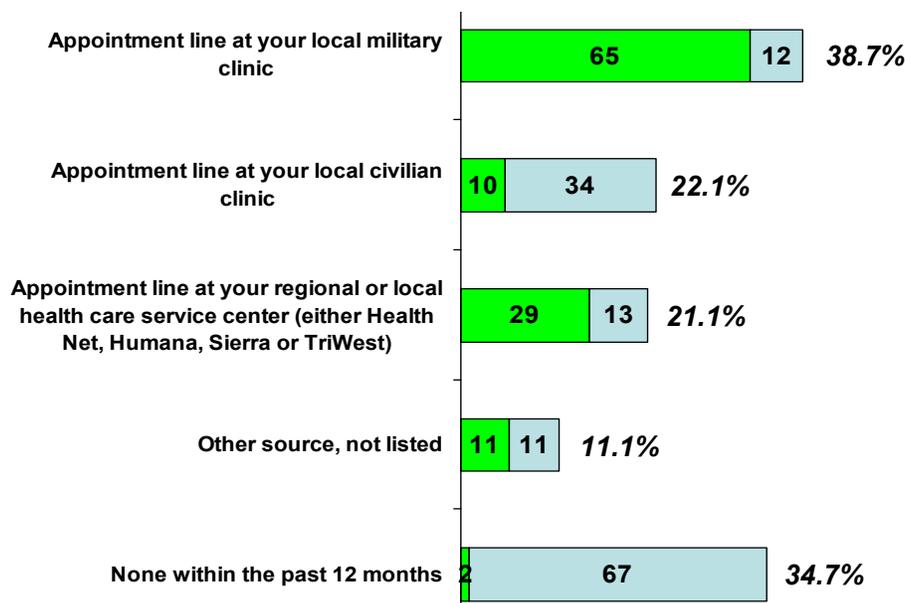


Comment: A February 2004 nationwide telephone survey of 4,170 randomly selected TRICARE users found 81% had sought TRICARE information within the past year. Appointments, finding a provider, and referrals were the three most frequently sought types of information mentioned by participants in that survey.

Information Sources

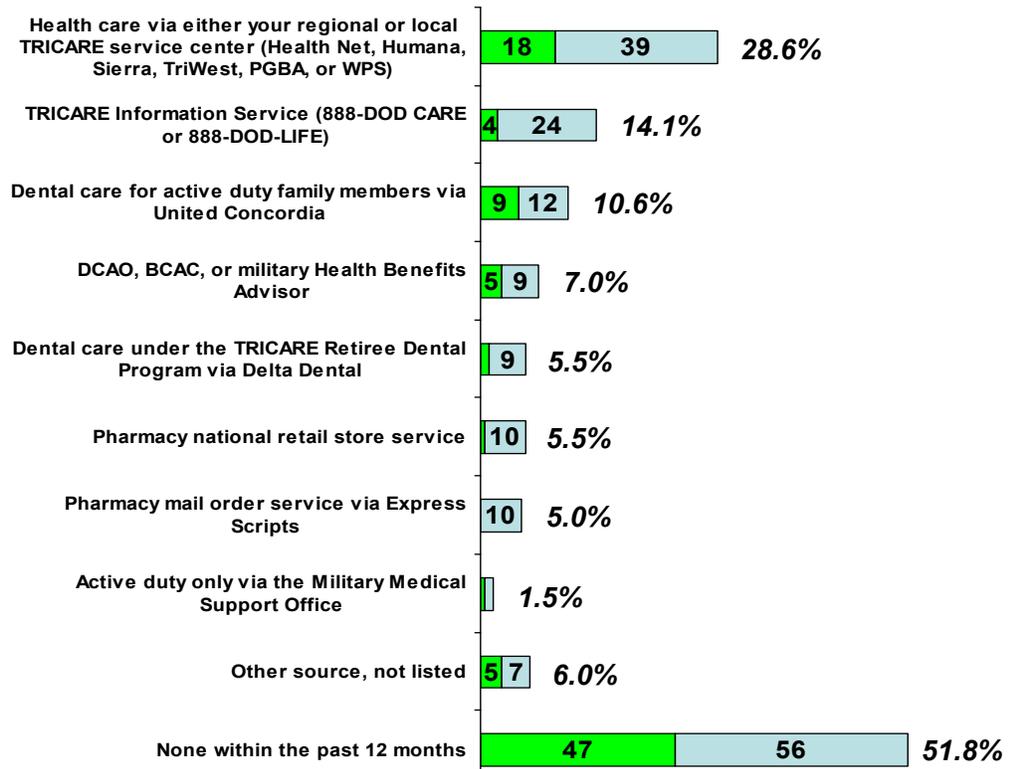
Use of specific sources for each of the above categories of information was detailed in the following five questions.

1) Appointments: During the past 12 months, have you attempted to call any of the following TRICARE sources to obtain a health care appointment? (Mark all that apply.)

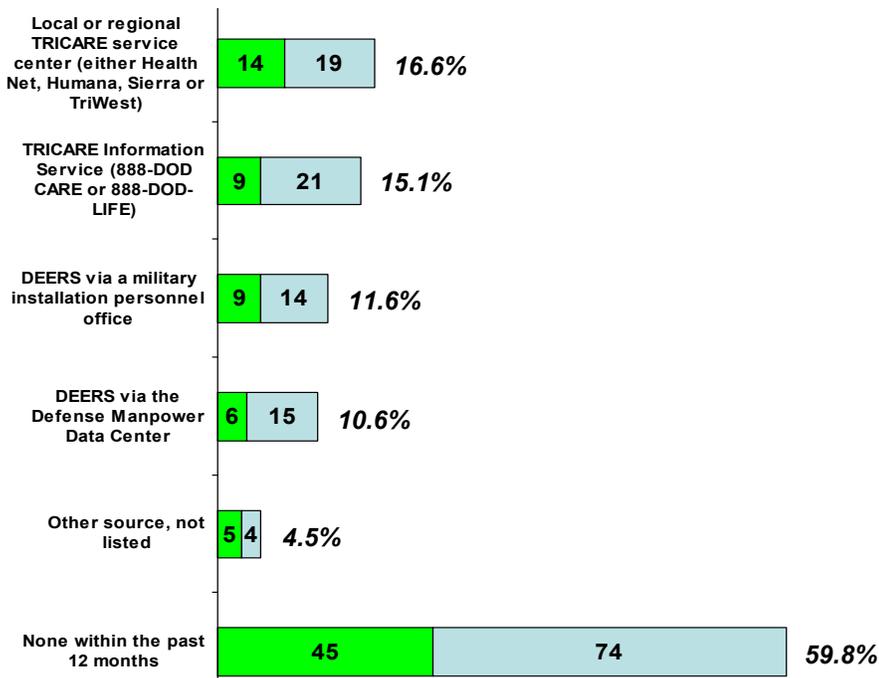


Note: Those using civilian sources of care may have responded either “None” or “Appointment line at local civilian clinic” since the question specified TRICARE sources.

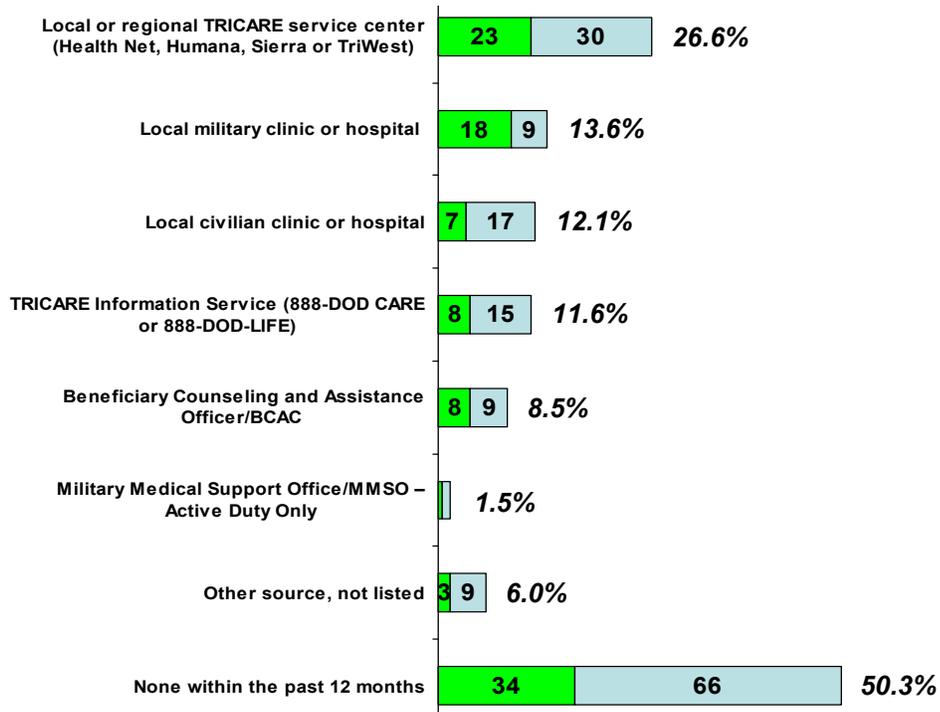
2) **Claim for Reimbursement or Payment:** During the past 12 months, have you attempted to call any of the following TRICARE sources regarding a claim for reimbursement or payment? (Mark all that apply.)



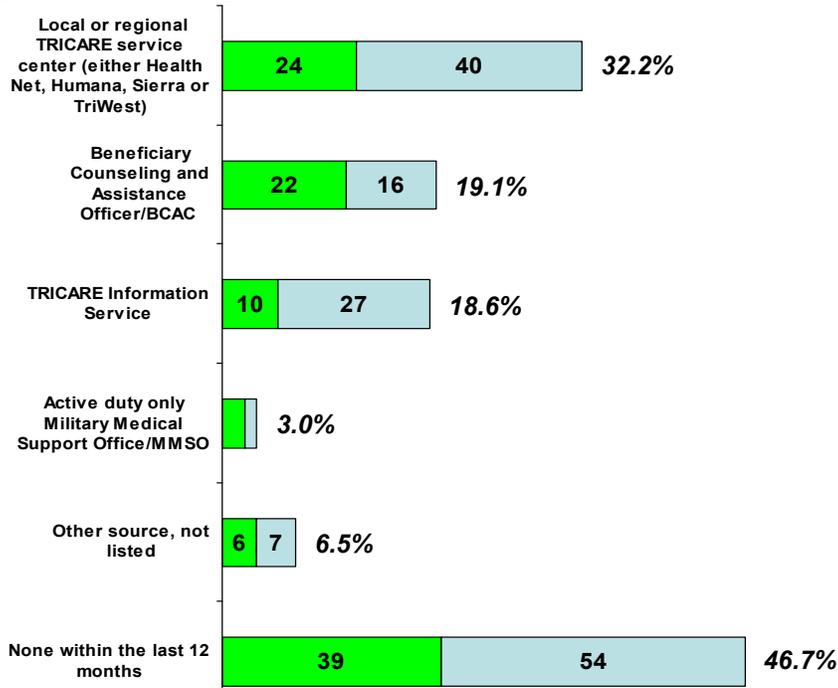
3) **Eligibility:** During the past 12 months, have you attempted to call any of the following sources regarding TRICARE eligibility? (Mark all that apply.)



4) **Find a Health Care Provider:** During the past 12 months, have you attempted to call any of the following sources to find a health care provider? (Mark all that apply.)



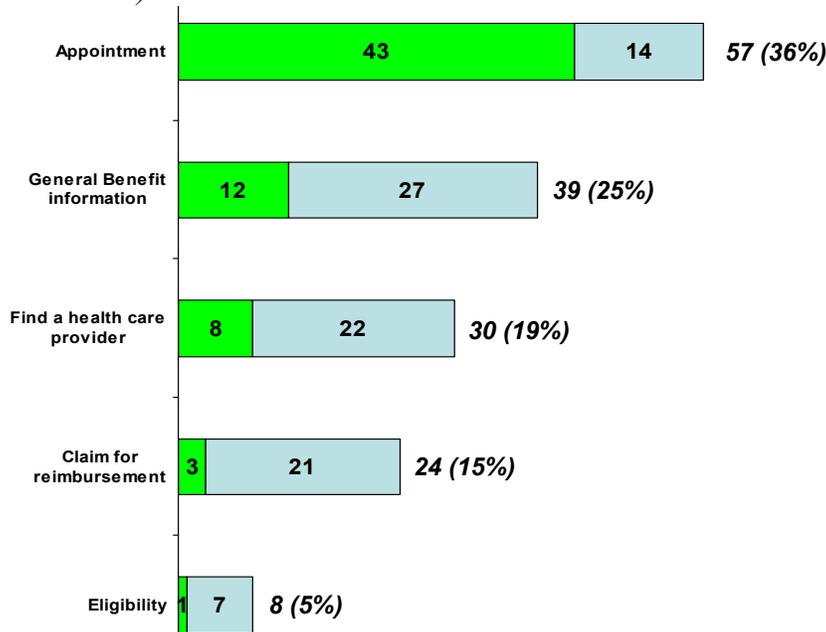
5) **General Benefit Information:** During the past 12 months, have you attempted to call any of the following sources to obtain general TRICARE benefit information? (Mark all that apply.)



Customer Service Interactions:

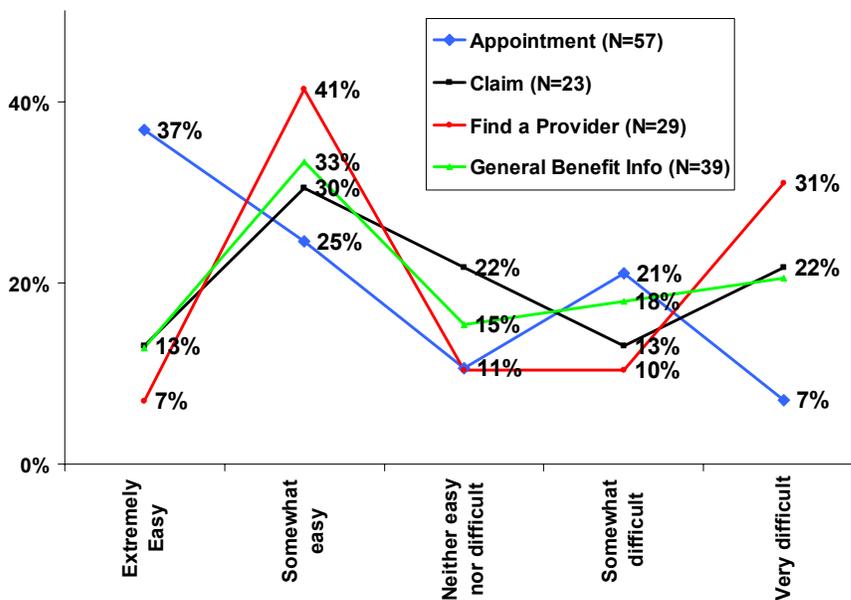
Survey participants who had sought telephonic support for any of these five information categories were asked to identify which was their most recent experience.

Most Recent Call: *Of the calls referenced in questions above, which was your most recent? (Mark only the most recent call.)*



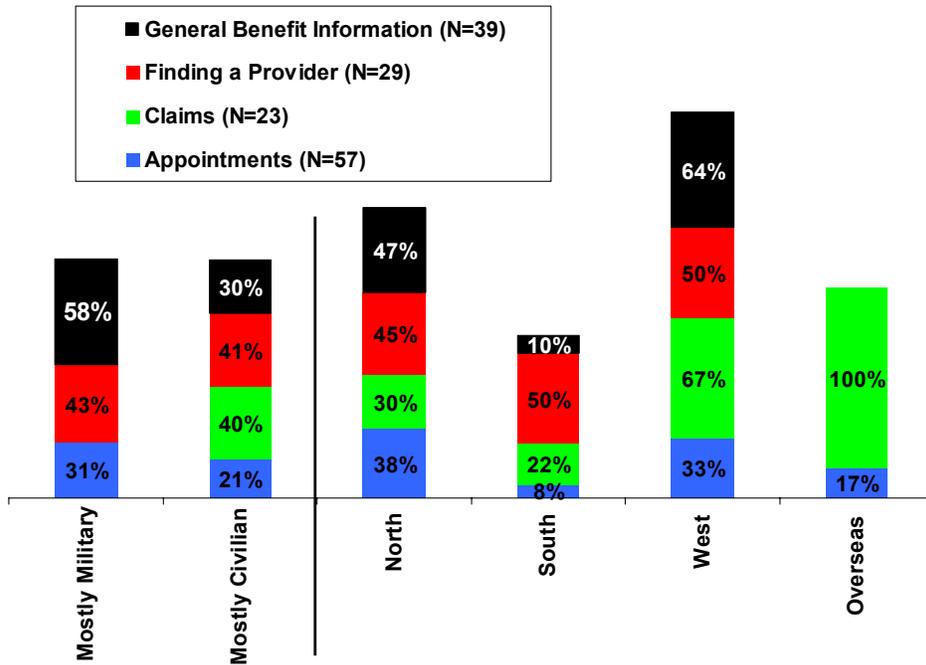
Respondents were then asked five questions about that most recent experience.

Identifying the Appropriate Source and Number to Call: *Thinking back to that most recent call for information, rate the relative ease or difficulty in identifying the appropriate source and the proper telephone number to call. (Mark for only the most recent call.)*



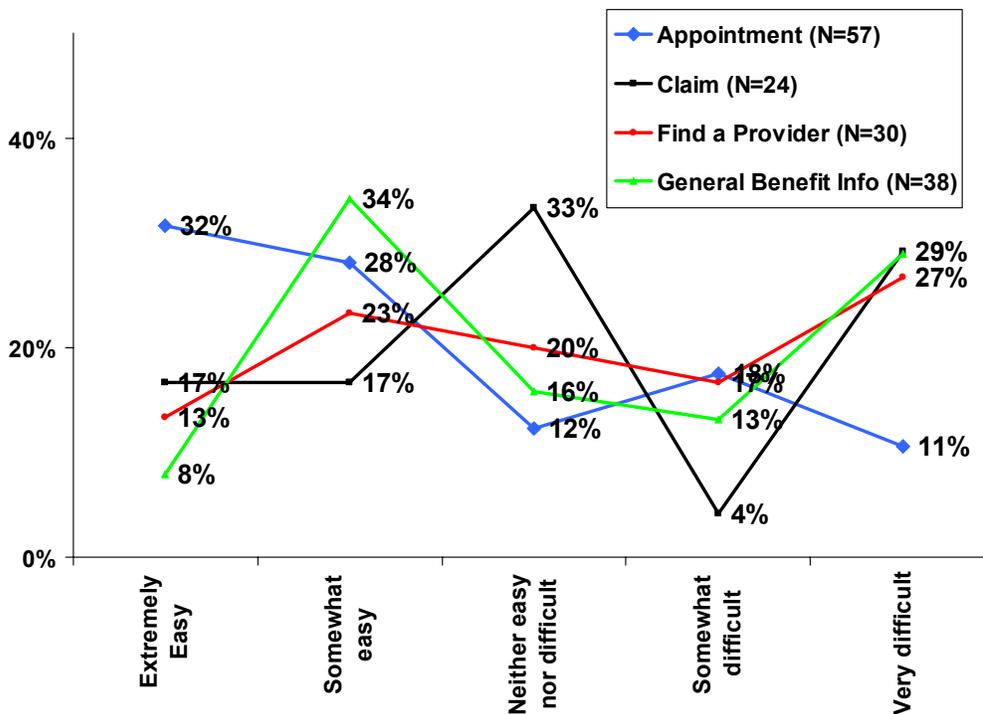
The number of respondents most recently calling about eligibility (8) was too small to allow statistical analysis, and results are not shown in the following slides. Demographics of those assigning problematic ratings of “somewhat difficult” and “very difficult” are shown in more detail below.

Problems Identifying Who to Call

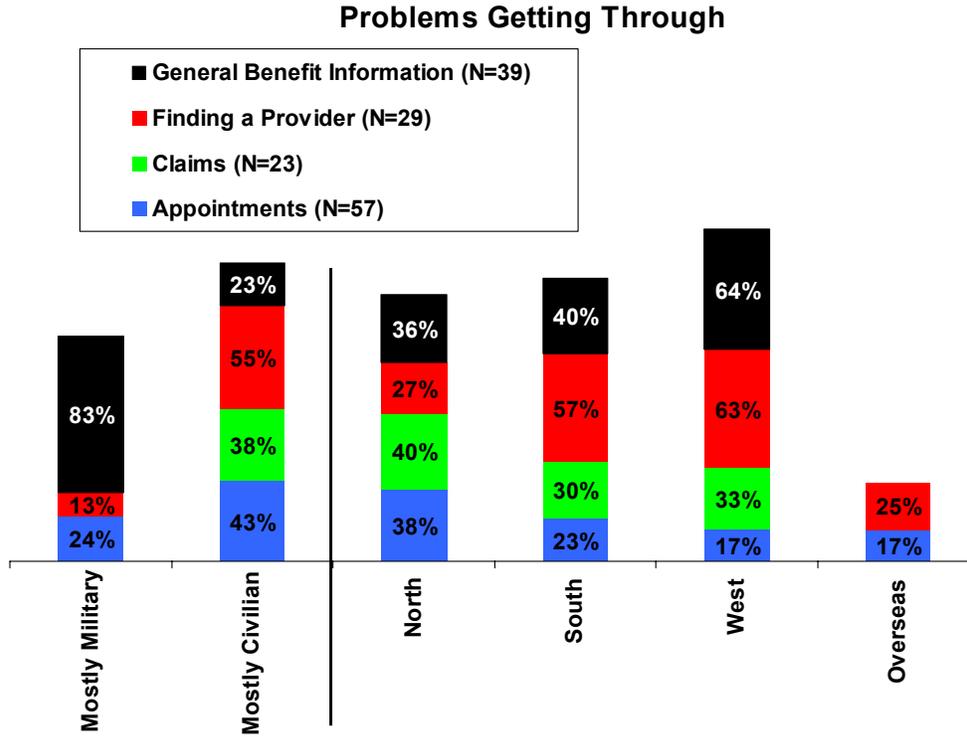


Note: The above result for overseas claims is based on a single response.

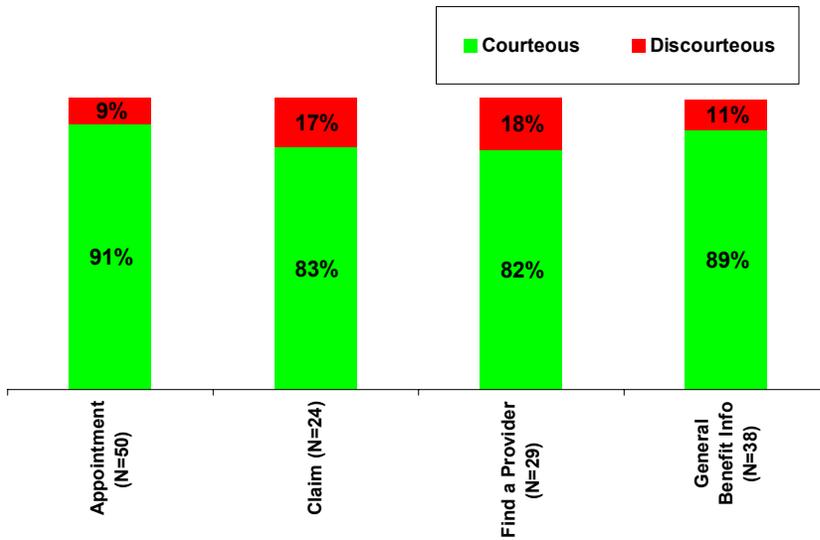
Getting Through: After identifying the proper telephone number for that most recent call, rate the relative ease or difficulty you had in getting through. (Mark for only the most recent call.)



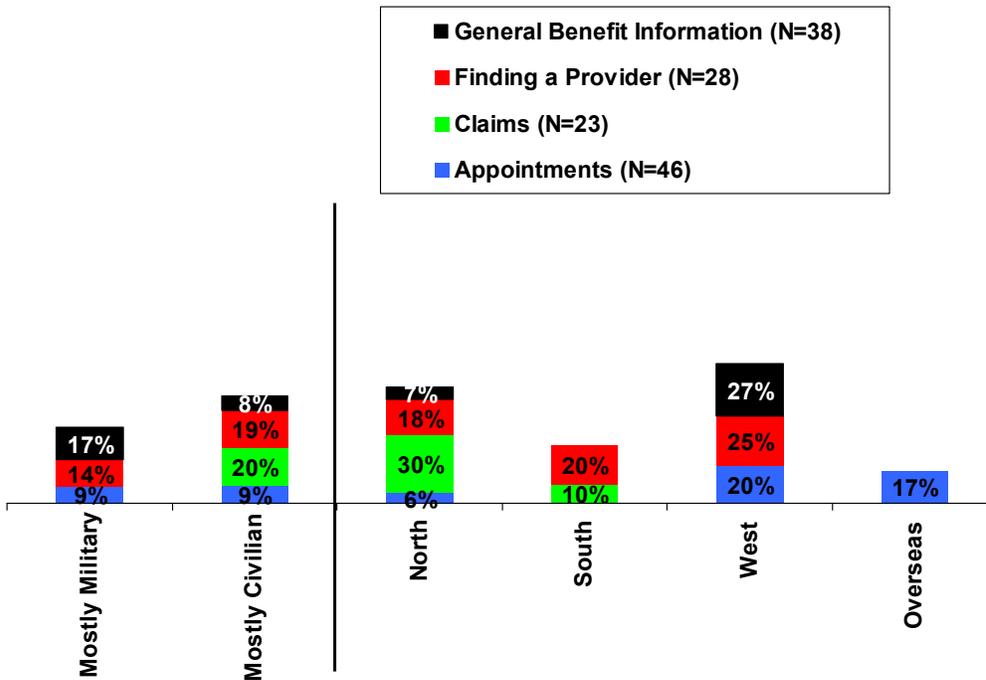
Problematic scores for getting through are shown below by source of care and Region.



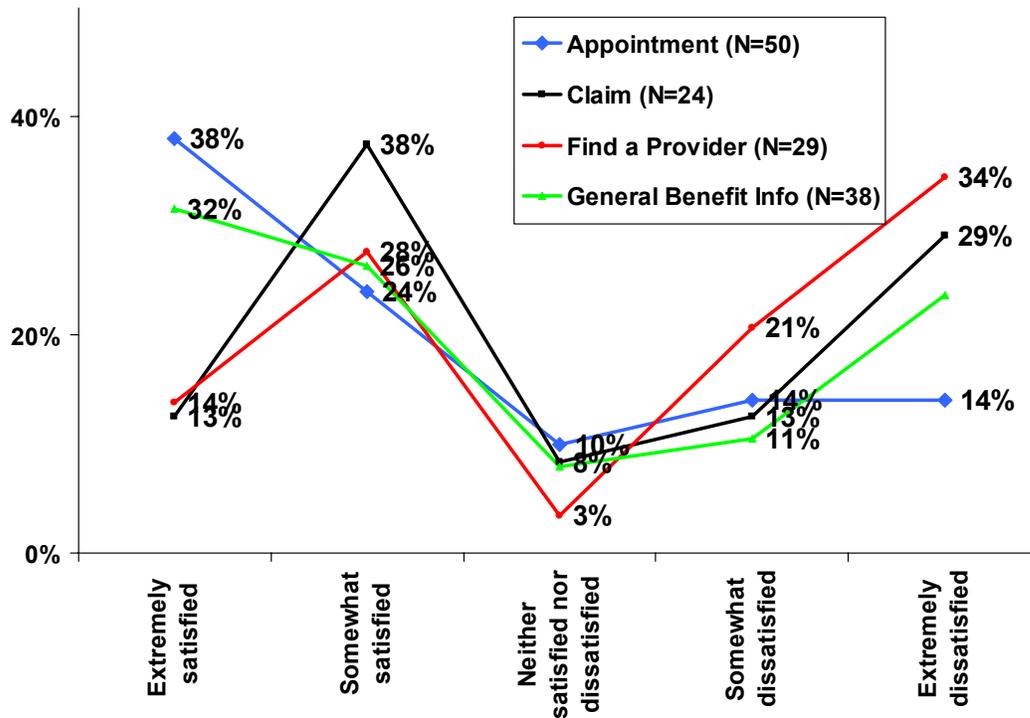
Customer Service Agent Courtesy: Was the customer service representative courteous? (Mark for only the most recent call.)



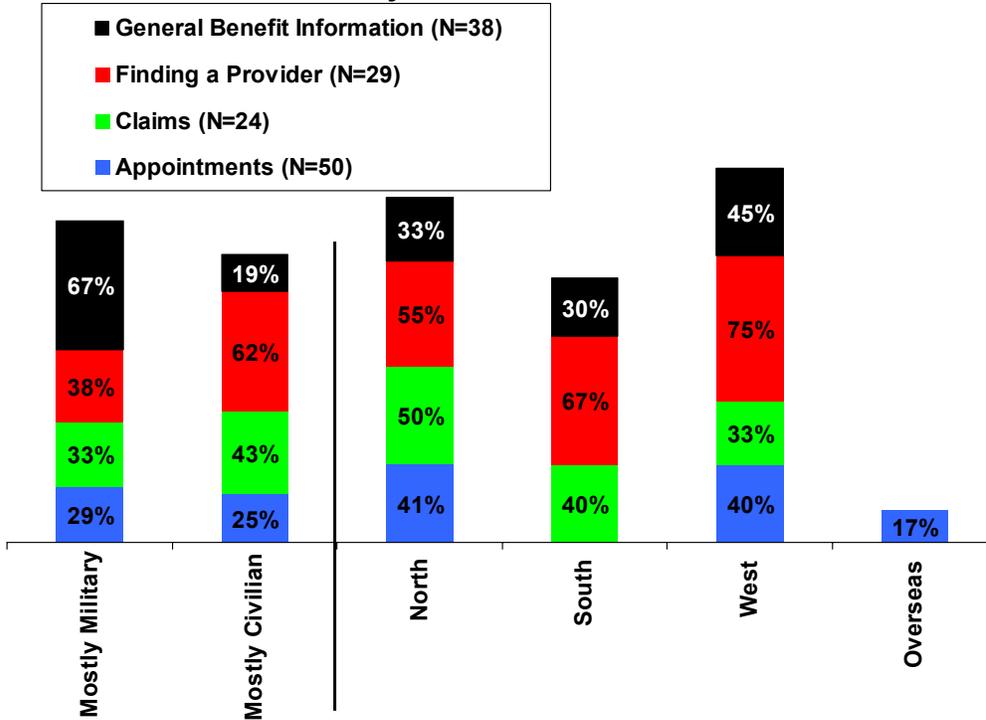
Discourteous Customer Service



Quality of Information/Assistance. Please rate your overall satisfaction with the quality of the information or assistance provided by the customer service agent. (Mark for only the most recent call.)



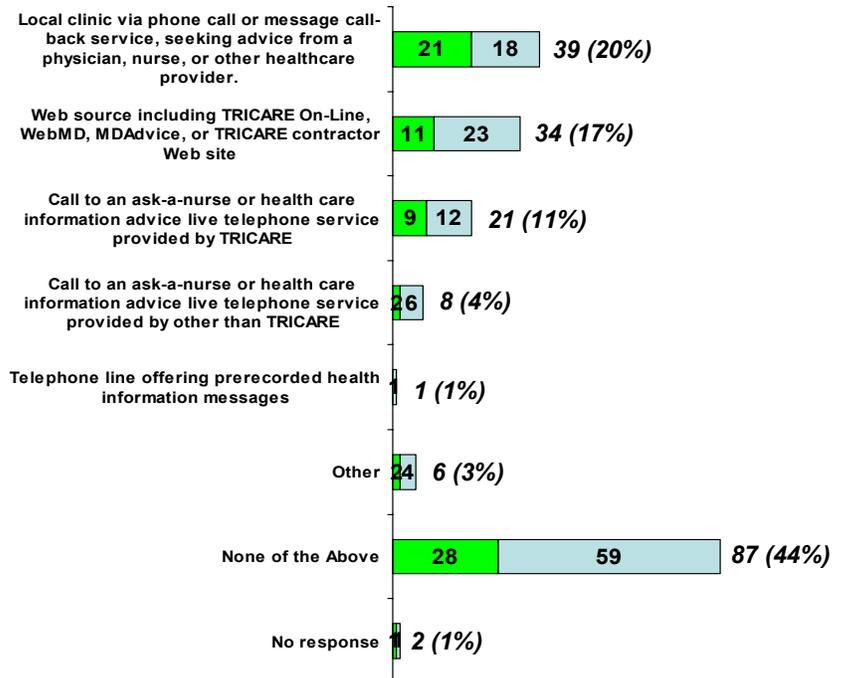
Quality of Information Problematic



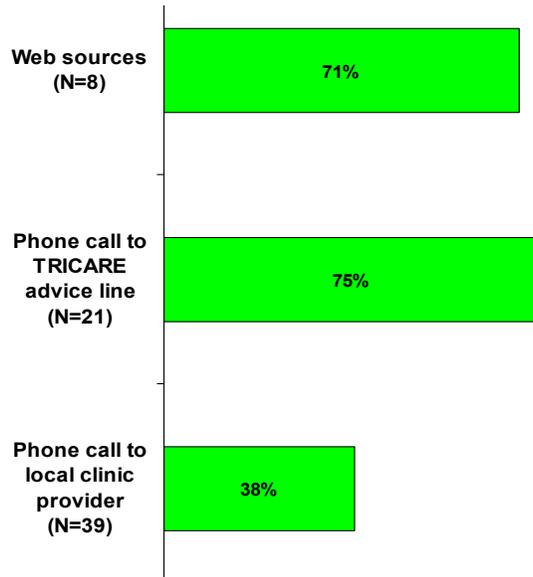
Healthcare Advice Services:

Sources: During the past 12 months, have you attempted to use any of the following sources to obtain general medical treatment advice? (Mark the response that applies to your most recent phone call seeking advice, if any)

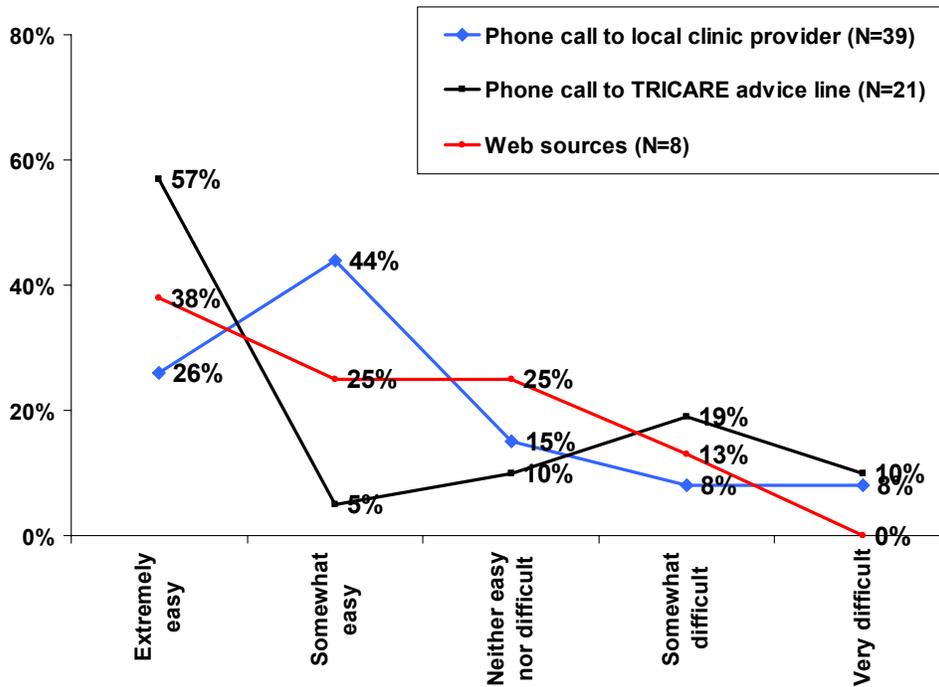
Note: The following four slides show results only for the three most frequently cited sources of advice.



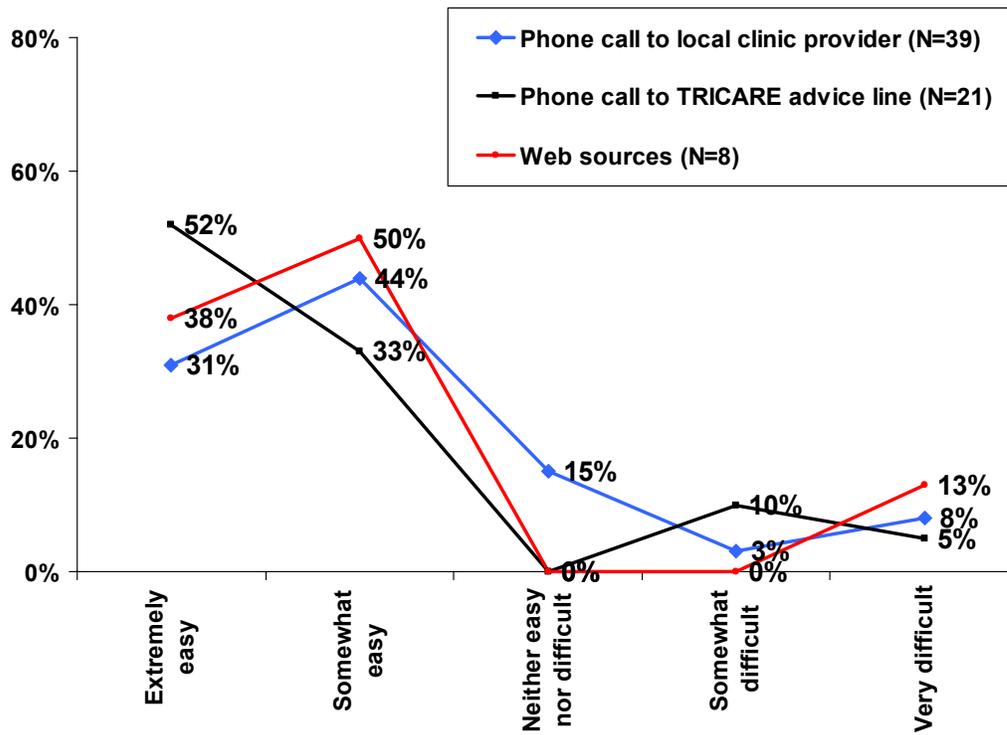
Availability of Advice Services: Regarding the medical advice service you referenced in question #12, is this service available to you on a 24-hour, 7-day per week basis? (Mark the response that applies best.)
 Shown: Percentage responding “Yes.”



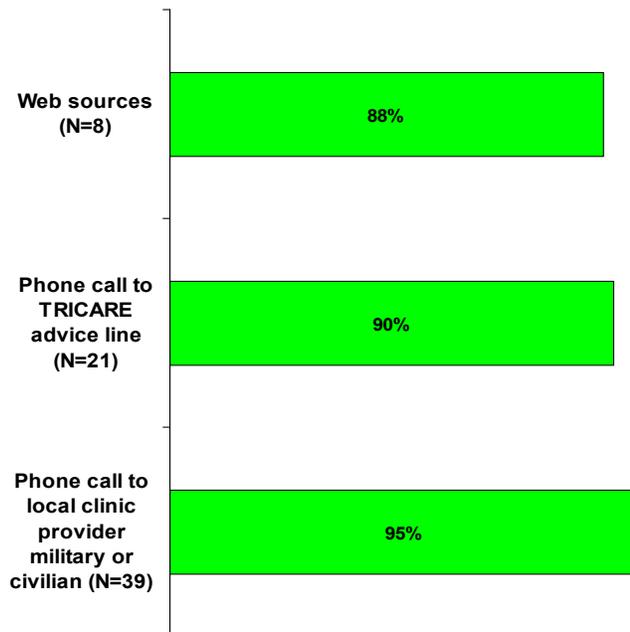
Identifying the Appropriate Source and Number to Call: Regarding that same medical advice service, rate your relative ease or difficulty in identifying the proper telephone number or Web address to use. (Mark the response that applies best.)



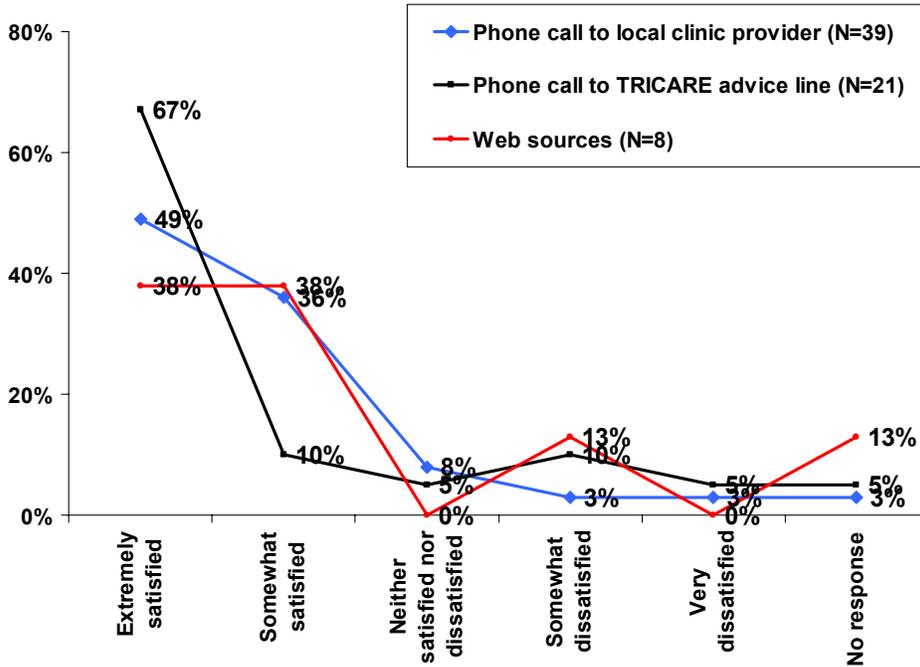
Getting Through: After identifying the proper telephone number or Web address for that most recent use, rate the relative ease or difficulty you had in getting through to obtain assistance. (Mark the response that applies best.)



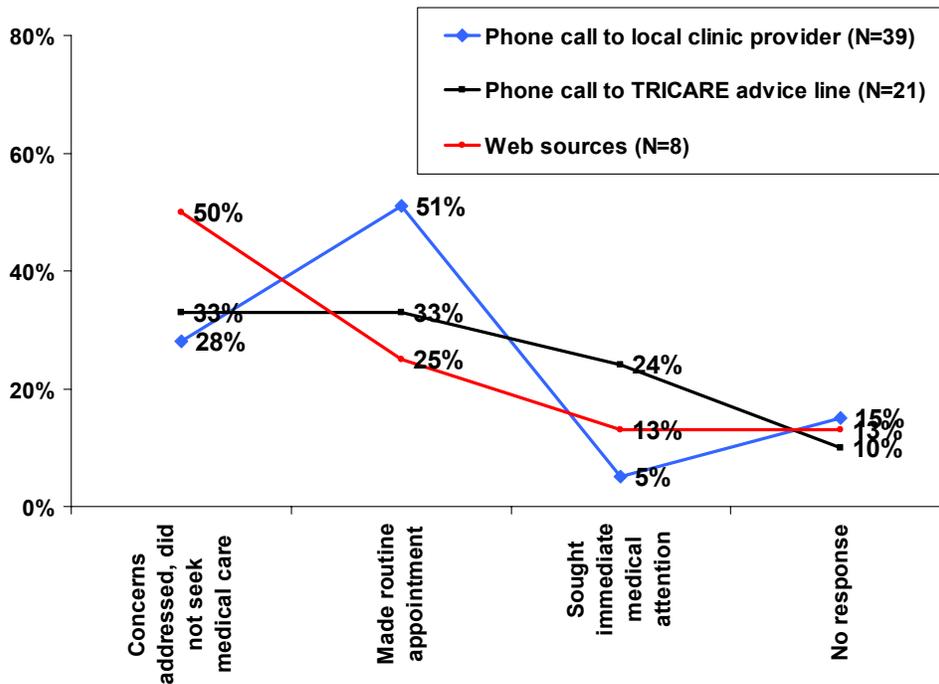
Courtesy: Was the person (if any) providing the medical advice courteous? Shown: Percentage responding "Yes."



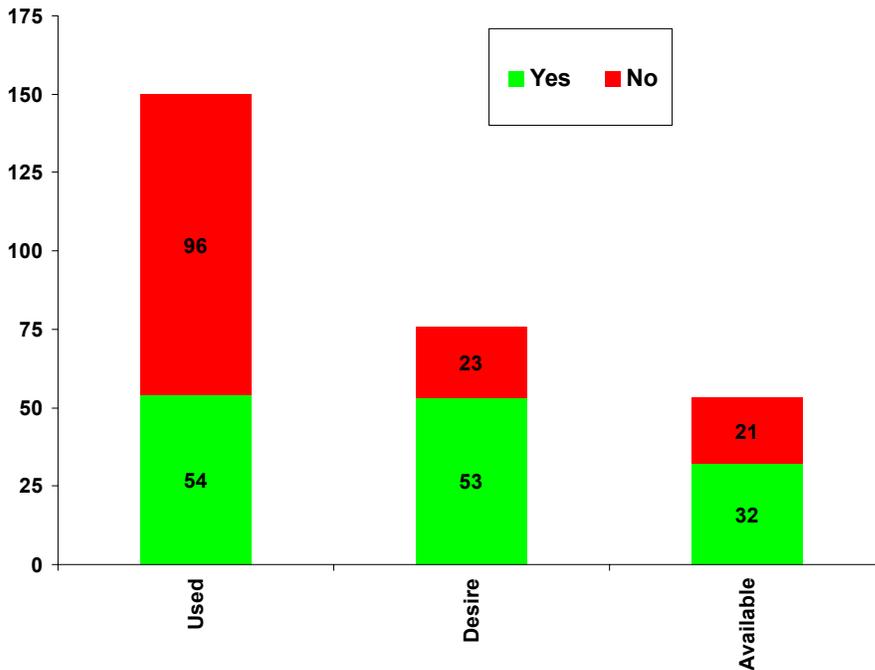
Quality of Advice Provided: Please rate your overall satisfaction with the quality of the medical advice provided to you. (Mark the response that applies best.)



Outcome: Based on the medical advice you received by phone or Web, what was the outcome? (Mark the response that applies best.)



Experience, Desire, and Availability: Regardless of your responses above, please indicate your use and access to a live toll-free telephone TRICARE Health Care Information Line (HCIL), also sometimes known as Ask-A-Nurse. (Mark ALL responses that apply.)



Comment: A large proportion of respondents failed to choose an option, therefore only raw number responses are shown here.

NEXT STEPS

In order to increase the survey power of the questions within this instrument, C&CS/ Customer Research and Analysis could pursue follow-up specifically with those group members who had a less-recent telephone interaction with TRICARE.

We will also use these results to inform the upcoming nationwide telephone survey.