

Audience Insights

Communicating to Internists



An internist specializes in internal medicine. They often care for patients over the duration of their adult lives (adolescents through seniors). Recognized as experts in the diagnosis and treatment of chronic illnesses, they also play an important role in health promotion and disease prevention.

Trends Among Today's Internists

1. General internists diagnose and provide nonsurgical treatment for a wide range of problems that affect internal organ systems, such as the stomach, kidneys, liver, and digestive tract.¹
2. Internists are sometimes referred to as the "doctor's doctor," because they are often called upon to act as consultants to other physicians when helping to solve puzzling diagnostic problems.²
3. Although internists may act as primary care physicians, they are not "family physicians," "family practitioners," or "general practitioners," whose training is not solely concentrated on adults and may include surgery, obstetrics and pediatrics.²
4. After a decline, beginning in the 90s, there appears to be resurgence in the demand for primary care physicians, with emphasis on internists.³
5. The U.S. internal medicine workforce consists of physicians, residents, and fellows, a substantial number of which are international medical graduates who come to the U.S. to do their residencies and fellowships and then remain for careers in practice, academia, or other areas.⁴
6. An increasing number of general internists are becoming "hospitalists" or hospital-based internists who provide care for general medicine patients in the hospital setting.⁵ Often, hospitalists are stationed primarily in the hospital to handle all admissions from a specific practice or group.
7. According to a compensation review for 2005-2006, internists earned between \$161,000 and \$180,880.⁶
8. A 2008 survey by the Merritt Hawkins & Associates health care staffing firm found approximately 11% of physicians are considering retiring from clinical practice during the next 1-3 years.⁷

Audience Insights can help you to communicate more effectively with your priority populations in order to influence their behavior. CDC's Strategic and Proactive Communication Branch (SPCB) divides audiences into segments with similar needs, preferences, and characteristics and provides CDC programs with audience-specific information, marketing expertise, and communication planning. To develop **Audience Insights**, secondary data is collected and analyzed from CDC-licensed consumer databases, books, articles, and the Internet. **For more information, email SPCBHealthMktg@cdc.gov.**

Office of the Associate Director for Communication
Division of Communication Services
Strategic and Proactive Communication Branch



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Internists at-a-Glance

These composites are for illustrative purposes only.



“During 7-10 minute office visits, I try to talk with my patients about their role in managing their disease and overall health. Often I feel rushed when there isn't enough time for me to talk with them and answer their questions.”

Elizabeth Jennings, M.D. (*Suburban group practice*)

Eugene, Oregon

Age: 45, Married: mother of two sons

- ◆ Works in an internal medicine practice with four other internists and two nurse physician assistants.
- ◆ Is active in her profession and community; speaks on health risks and lifestyle issues at assisted living centers.
- ◆ Sees an increasing number of patients over age 65 on Medicare and fixed incomes.
- ◆ Increases her knowledge of geriatric medicine via continuing medical education (CME) courses and medical journals.
- ◆ Spends 25% of her time caring for patients in hospital settings.
- ◆ Uses health-related Web sites, including professional association sites, for up-to-date medical information and access to CME.



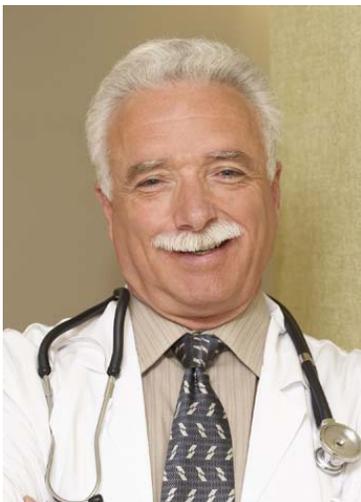
“I encourage my practice to make better use of available technology including electronic medical records and systems that will integrate information-sharing with the hospitals where our patients receive care.”

Eric Lewis, M.D. (*Inner-city group practice*)

Chicago, Illinois

Ages: 33, Single

- ◆ Likes the fast pace of an inner city practice that is connected to a hospital.
- ◆ Is on the staff of a downtown medical center and also volunteers two nights a week at an inner-city HIV/AIDS clinic.
- ◆ Recently joined a group of African-American physicians that mentors high school and college students interested in medical and public health careers.
- ◆ Uses a BlackBerry® equipped with Epocrates Rx for drug references; uses high speed Internet in his medical office and at home.
- ◆ Receives and returns email messages from his patients, usually in the evening after his regular office hours.



“I've seen many changes in medicine since I began my practice forty years ago. When I retire in a few years, my two sons will take over my practice. With all the new technology available today, they will modernize and expand my existing practice to serve more patients.”

Patrick Austin, M.D. (*Solo practice in rural city*)

Jamestown, North Dakota

Age: 64, Married: father of four

- ◆ Has been a practicing internist for 40 years in the same office location; has treated several generations of patients and established long and rewarding personal relationships with them.
- ◆ Is concerned about the trend towards a fragmented, over-specialized, and inefficient health care system and the decreasing numbers of internists and family physicians coming into practice.
- ◆ Spends more than 20% of his time caring for uninsured and under-insured patients. Usually takes more than 7-10 minutes with his patients, so frequently runs behind schedule.
- ◆ Plans to retire from full-time clinical practice in two years. Looks forward to continuing his hobby of fly-fishing and traveling via recreational vehicle with his wife.

Targeted Health Communication

Knowing the **habits and preferences** of internists can help you plan health communication and marketing efforts for this audience.

- ▶ Internists need to get information in a quick and easy-to-access way; remember their time is very limited.
- ▶ Involve internists in research and communication development by including them in focus groups, surveys, field tests, or in-depth interviews. Use this data to develop messages or concepts that are better tailored or targeted to resonate with internists.
- ▶ For primary market research, consider recruiting internists at an academic medical center or hospital. Make it convenient for them to participate by conducting the research onsite.
- ▶ Medical websites and journals are highly regarded by internists and should be used to convey health-related information. According to the Porter Novelli's 2008 DocStyles survey, most internists don't rely on Podcasts, radio, television, or flyers to obtain health-related information.⁸
- ▶ There is a trend with internists toward offering in-office health education videos to patients. CBS provides video content to *Healium* (<http://www.avtvnetworks.net>[†]), which operates digital TV on monitors in medical offices around the country, delivering information to three million viewers per month.¹¹
- ▶ Think about partnerships with specialty-aligned professional medical groups and their Web sites, such as the American College of Physicians, Internists, Doctors for Adultssm www.acponline.org[†].
- ▶ When doing research with internists, consider firms that specialize in marketing research services targeting healthcare professionals. Information on these firms can be found through resources such as www.greenbook.org/market-research-firms.cfm/doctors-physicians[†].

Where Do Internists Get Their Health-Related Information?

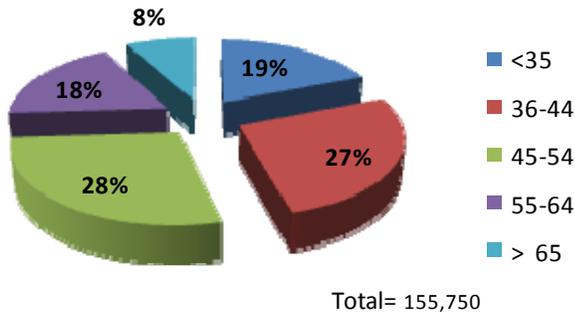
- ▶ According to Porter Novelli's 2008 DocStyles, 87% of internists "often or regularly" use medical journals for health-related information, 71% use medical Web sites or other physicians, 48% refer to government health agencies like CDC or NIH, and 48% refer to books.⁸
- ▶ According to this same 2008 study, 66% of internists "never or rarely" use radio as a health-related information source; 59% television; 58% patient advocacy groups; and 51% podcasts.⁸
- ▶ Online physician communities are becoming a resource for internists to discuss patient care and solicit feedback from their peers. Consider Internet banner advertising on such online communities as the 6000-physician-member community website Sermo, www.sermo.com[†], as well as WebMD's recently launched Medscape Physician Connect, www.medscape.com/connect^{†,9}.
- ▶ Each day, internists can access *The Doctor's Channel Daily Newscast* (<http://www.thedoctorschannel.com/go/reuters/>[†]) offering succinct video content (one- or two-minute full motion videos) featuring the top three health news stories each day as reported by Reuters.¹⁰



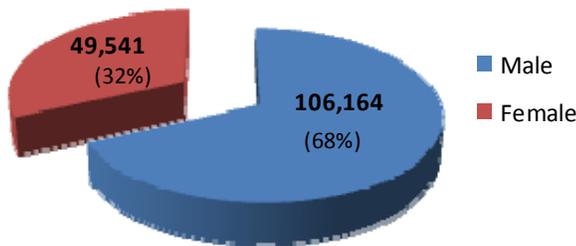
Who Are Internists

► The majority of practicing internists (55%) in the U.S., both men and women, are between the ages of 36-54 years-of-age.¹²

Total Internists by Age in Years



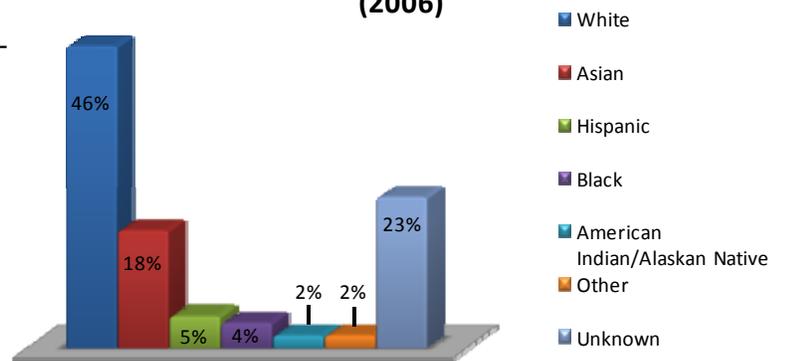
Total Number of Internists by Gender¹²



► The race/ethnicity of most internists is white males (47%), followed by white females (43%).¹²

► There are ongoing U.S. programs designed to increase the number of African American and minority physicians by introducing young students to physician role models and to medicine as a profession. One example is the Florida State University College of Medicine in Tallahassee program that targets minority and rural students with a comprehensive program providing early intervention at the middle school level and follows them through their undergraduate years. The program prepares students to be competitive applicants for medical school.¹³

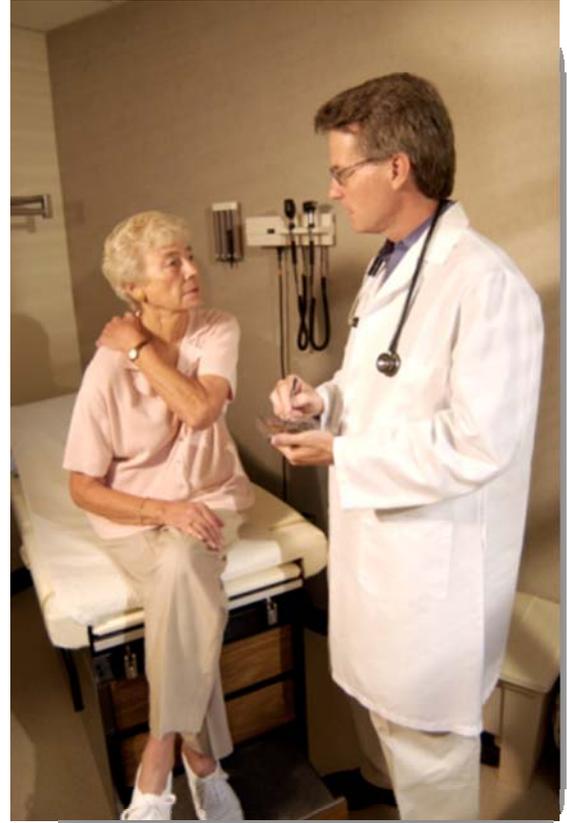
Physicians by Self-Designated Race/Ethnicity (2006)



SOURCE: American Medical Association, *Physician Characteristics and Distribution in the US, 2008 Edition*¹²

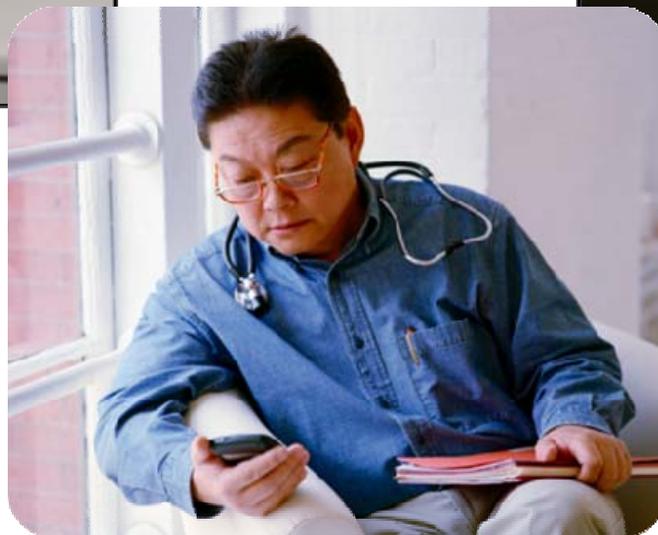
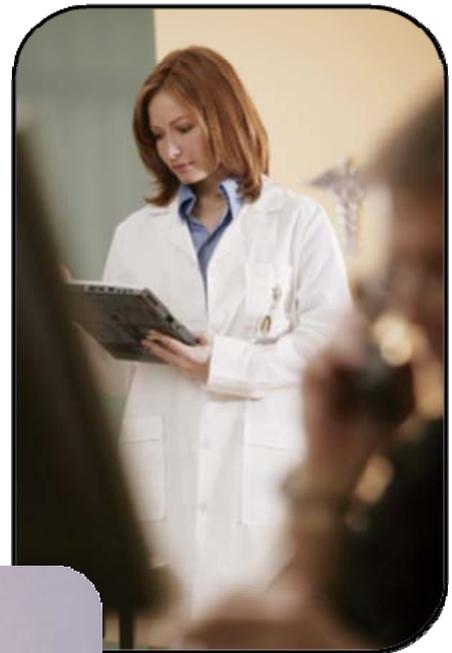
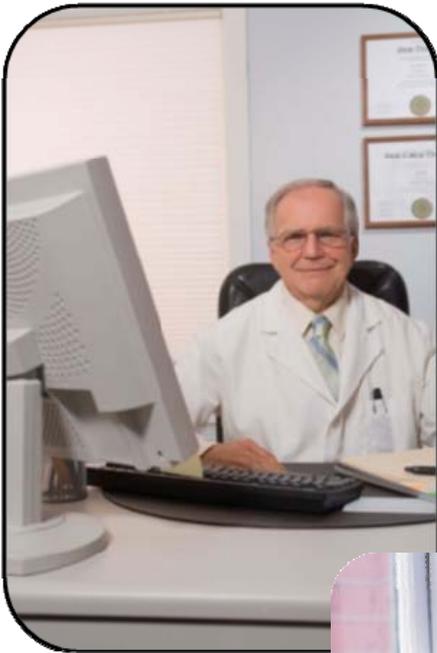
More on Today's Internists

- ▶ Simply put, internists are doctors of internal medicine. But you may see them referred to by several terms, including "internists," "general internists" and "doctors of internal medicine."²
- ▶ Don't mistake them with "interns," who are doctors in their first year of residency training.²
- ▶ According to the Porter Novelli's 2008 DocStyles survey the majority of internal medicine practices in the United States are group practices (56%); followed by those based in hospitals or clinics (25%). Only 19% are individual practices.⁸
- ▶ Many primary care specialists are general internists. Treating patients referred to them by other specialists, as well as referring their patients to other specialists when necessary.¹
- ▶ Internists are moving toward "connected health" emphasizing two core elements: self-care and remote care.
 - Self-care involves "getting patients the feedback, motivation, and education they need to manage their conditions on a day-to-day basis."
 - Remote care involves "monitoring, diagnosing, and communicating with patients at a distance."¹²
- ▶ The majority of physicians (63%) work 51 hours or more per week, while only 38% reported working more than 61 hours a week.⁷
- ▶ Approximately two-thirds (63%) said that the growing volume of non-clinical paperwork they face has caused them to spend less time with their patients. Over 90% said that the amount of time they spend on non-clinical paperwork has increased in the last three years.⁷



Internists and the Use of Online Media

- ▶ Physicians want to receive the majority of their pharmaceutical and device product information through online and other electronic sources. Forty-one percent of their research on new drugs and medical devices is now done online, and is expected to increase to over 50% in the near future.¹⁴
- ▶ Ninety-eight percent own or use a high speed Internet connection in their medical office.⁸
- ▶ More than 62% report using an electronic mobile device such as an iPhone or Smartphone, and about a third of medical schools now require new students to have this technology at their disposal.⁸
- ▶ According to a report by Manhattan Research, a New York City drug and health care market research company, 64% of doctors nationwide own Smartphones with the number expected to increase to 81% by 2012.¹⁵
- ▶ Seventeen percent currently own or use an iPod in their medical office.⁷



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† For informational purposes only. Not a CDC endorsement.

* Note: Some of the weblinks may not be live, or may require registration to access the resource



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For more information, email SPCBHealthMktg@cdc.gov
Internet: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthmarketing/resources.htm#insights>

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