

Patients Seek Preparation for Future Diagnoses

By Christina Orlovsky, senior staff writer

In this age of information at your fingertips, it is easier than ever to educate yourself about disease and conditions—long before they actually affect you. Patients, it seems, are eager to learn just what the future holds when it comes to their health, according to a recent survey.

The survey, conducted by Directive Analytics for Siemens Medical Solutions, found that nearly three-quarters of consumers (72 percent) would take a test that identifies diseases 20 years before symptoms appear. More than one-third of the 1,111 adults surveyed said they'd even want to know now if they would be diagnosed sometime in their life with an incurable disease.

Partha Ghosh, M.D., clinical marketing manager of molecular imaging for Siemens Medical Solutions, explained that consumers' interest in future health predictions is directly related to the information they have at the ready on their computers.

"The average patient is more aware now of the importance of preventive medicine—people are finding out from the Internet about every disease," he said. "It will be even more aggressive in the future and people will want to know more about their own conditions. Plus, with new technology—genetic profiling and risk assessment—this will be even more prevalent in years to come."

Ghosh indicated that there are two specific health areas where predictive medicine is becoming more prevalent: cancer and Alzheimer's disease, which have both been linked to genetic predisposition.

"For cancer, a lot of people looking for an early test are those who have things in their family and they fear that the cancer may have some kind of genetic link," he explained. "This is important because we have seen many cancers where family predilection is important."

The second group of people currently likely to seek predictive tests are those who have been exposed to dementia in their relatives.

"People see their family being affected and fear is driving them to get tested," Ghosh added.

"Instead of fear being the most important criteria, we need to make awareness more important—to make people more aware of their risks."

The Siemens survey also asked respondents what they would do if they found out they would be affected by a serious disease in the future. More than half (52 percent) said they would "aggressively pursue treatment at any cost," if they found out they would be diagnosed with an incurable disease. More women (59 percent) than men (45 percent) said they would be more likely to educate themselves and seek treatment at any cost if they were to receive a negative prognosis. In fact, 16 percent of men, versus 9 percent of women, said they would be likely to "do nothing."

While the majority of respondents said they would be interested in undergoing predictive testing, just over half (53 percent) could identify imaging tests used to predict disease like cancer and Alzheimer's.

Ghosh added that nurses' role in the future of predictive and preventive medicine lies in the areas of education and raising awareness not only of disease risks but also of the availability of testing methods.

"Particularly with patients who are more aware of future trends, an informed nurse can make them appreciate the importance of preventive medicine," he said.

For more information, visit the [Siemens Medical Solutions](#) Web site.