

HEALTH NEWS

Survey Asks: How Well Do Physicians Treat Older Patients?

(NAPSA)—Starting in 2012, nearly 10,000 Americans will turn 65 every day—“baby boomers” will become “senior boomers.”

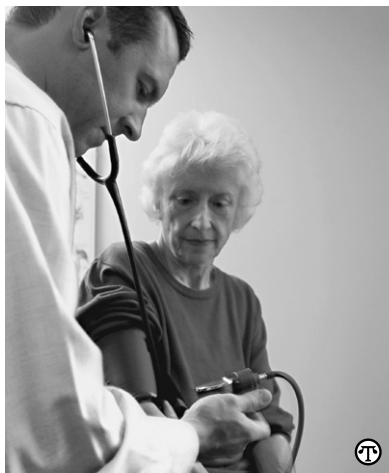
The average 75-year-old has three chronic conditions and uses five prescription drugs. Older patients have unique health challenges and different medical needs than younger adults.

For older adults to live not just longer but better lives, they need the best possible care from primary care physicians for their unique conditions. These physicians are often the first line of treatment for older patients. Unfortunately, a gap sometimes exists between what they know, and what they need to know, to treat older patients.

A physician survey recently commissioned by the Merck Institute of Aging & Health confirms this information gap and the belief that primary care physicians may not always be providing the best geriatric care.

Only half of the 250 physicians surveyed believe that their colleagues can adequately treat a number of common geriatric conditions, such as falls, memory loss and incontinence. Furthermore, only about one in three believe their colleagues can treat sensory impairments often found in older Americans.

A number of physicians believe that if older adults are to thrive, the geriatric information gap must be closed. A mandatory geriatrics requirement in all medical schools would be a good first step. But even if geriatric



training were required today, it would still take 40 years for all practicing primary care physicians to be replaced by those with geriatric training.

A more realistic and quicker way to close the gap is to educate practicing primary care physicians. The Merck Institute of Aging & Health—a new non-profit organization working to improve the health and independence of older adults worldwide—is doing just that.

The Institute's Web site, www.miaonline.org, provides a set of new geriatric resources and tools. These online tool kits are aimed at educating both primary care physicians and consumers. The first series of tool kits address memory loss, depression, urinary incontinence, and falls. Older adults and their families can also use question checklists and other tool kit resources in talking with their doctors.