

# **Patient Communication Survey**

## **Executive Summary**

A RESEARCH REPORT BY



# METHODOLOGY

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This survey was initiated on June 1, 2011 by MPA Media, publishers of *Dynamic Chiropractic*, *Massage Today*, *Acupuncture Today* and *Dynamic Chiropractic Practice Insights*. The survey was sent to 38,737 doctors of chiropractic (DC). The response rate was 1.7 percent. Like all online surveys, participants tend to “self-select” based upon their interest in the topic presented.

# DISCUSSION

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This survey was created to establish the habits and opinions of DCs as they relate to the practice-patient communication outside of the clinic. This includes how they use electronic health record (EHR) software to communicate to their patients. Of those surveyed, the first question reveals that 76 percent of DCs communicate with their patients outside of their clinic, while 24 percent say they do not communicate with patients outside of their clinic.

## **DCs who communicate with patients outside of their practice**

When asked how they communicate with patients outside of the office, nearly three quarters (71 percent) say they conduct personal phone calls, 68 percent say they communicate via the postal service (through cards, letters, etc.), 61 percent say email, 59 percent say they communicate through their office/practice website, 48 percent communicate through an e-mail newsletter and 47 percent say Facebook. From here, the numbers drop significantly. Only 19 percent say they communicate through a printed newsletter, 9 percent say Twitter, 8 percent communicate through automated e-mail, 6 percent say auto text message and only 1 percent say automated phone calls.

If they contact their patients through electronic/social media/web services, 40 percent of DCs say these electronic communications have been very or somewhat effective for gaining new patients, while 37 percent say they have been somewhat or very ineffective for gaining



new patients. Forty-four percent say electronic communication has been very or somewhat effective for reminding patients to come in regularly, while 24 percent say it has been somewhat or very ineffective and 22 percent say they don't use these services to remind patients to come in regularly, but they think it would be beneficial. Nearly half (45 percent) say that electronic communication has been very or somewhat effective for sparking patient referrals and 30 percent disagree, saying that it has been somewhat or very ineffective.

More than a third of DCs (35 percent) report that their front office person is the most responsible for communicating with patients outside the office. Eighteen percent say an office manager communicates with patients outside the office and 12 percent report that a chiropractic assistant handles outside communication with patients. Another 35 percent chose an option specifying "other." Most of these "other" responses indicate that DCs contact the patient outside of the office themselves.

Half of DCs say that holidays and/or birthdays prompt them to contact patients outside of the office, 40 percent say it is a part of their regular patient newsletter, another 40 percent say they contact patients for an upcoming appointment, 33 percent say a newsletter prompts them, 30 percent make contact after specific test results come in, 25 percent say they contact patients regularly and do not require a special reason, 14 percent say they follow up after every exam and 9 percent contact their patients to re-order supplements or other consumables.

More than a third of DCs (37 percent) think every 30 days is the best time interval in which to regularly contact their patients, followed by every two weeks (17 percent), every 60 days or more (15 percent), every week (11 percent) and only for appointments (8 percent). Nearly all respondents (94 percent) say that regular communication with patients outside of the practice is either very or somewhat important. The remainder (6 percent) indicate that it is somewhat or very unimportant.

The majority of DCs (39 percent) say that personal phone calls are the most effective way to communicate with patients outside of their practice, followed by e-mail (16 percent), e-mail newsletter (13 percent), postal service (12 percent), printed newsletter (5 percent), Facebook (5 percent), office/practice website (4 percent) and auto text message (1 percent).



## **DCs who do not communicate with patients outside of their practice**

We asked the 24 percent of respondents who indicated that they do not communicate with patients outside of their practice to answer a few questions regarding their thoughts on outside patient communication. The DCs who answered yes were asked the same questions.

More than a third of DCs who don't communicate with their patients outside the office (34 percent) think only for appointments is the best time interval in which to regularly contact their patients, followed by every 30 days (21 percent), every 60 days or more (16 percent), every two weeks (10 percent) and every week (7 percent). Nearly all respondents (94 percent) say that regular communication with patients outside of the practice is either very or somewhat important. The remainder (6 percent) indicate that it is somewhat or very unimportant.

Similar to the DCs who communicate with their patients outside of the practice, the majority of DCs in this category (24 percent) say that personal phone calls are the most effective way to communicate with patients outside of their practice, followed by e-mail newsletter (20 percent), postal service (15 percent), e-mail (14 percent), office/practice website (7 percent), Facebook (6 percent), printed newsletter (5 percent) and auto e-mail (1 percent).

## **DCs who communicate with patients outside of their practice and use EHR software**

Out of the 76 percent of DCs who communicate with their patients outside of their practice, 7 percent use EHR software to communicate to their patients outside of their practice. Out of this 7 percent, nearly two-thirds (62 percent) regularly use EHR for appointment reminders, while 45 percent use it regularly for auto-appointment reminders via e-mail or text message (but another 43 percent say they never use it for this purpose). It seems that this group of DCs is mixed about their use of EHR to distribute general chiropractic and health information to patients. Here, more than a third (33 percent) regularly use EHR for this function, 37 percent say sometimes and 29 percent never use EHR for this function. The majority of DCs



in this group (67 percent) never use EHR to send reminders to replenish supplies of supplements, herbs and other consumable products, while 28 percent sometimes use EHR for this. Nearly half (44 percent) never use EHR to send personalized messages from the chiropractor to individual patients (though 41 percent sometimes use it for this purpose). The use of EHR to send holiday and special occasion messages was spread across the board in this group of DCs. Here, 42 percent sometimes use it for this purpose, followed by 33 percent who never use it for this purpose and 24 percent say they regularly use EHR to send these messages.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, it appears that DCs still prefer “older” methods of communication when contacting their patients. The majority of respondents (both DCs who currently contact their patients and those who do not) say that they use or would use personal phone calls or the postal service to communicate with their patients. However, e-mail, e-mail newsletters, practice websites and Facebook are right behind these “older” methods of communication. This suggests that even though some electronic methods of communication (Facebook) are relatively new, they are fast becoming a highly used method of communication for these DCs.

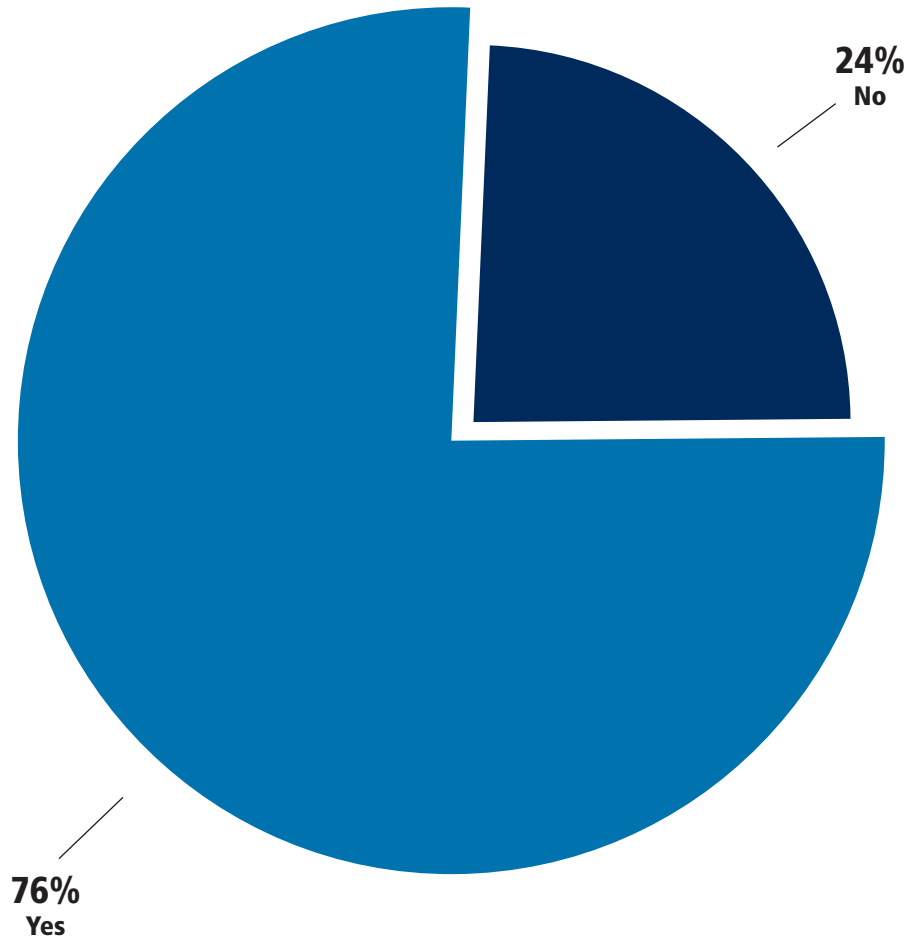
Upon comparing a set of questions presented to both groups of DCs (those who contact their patients outside of their practice and those who do not), it was not surprising to note that most of the responses tended to go in opposite directions. For example, when asked to name the best time interval in which to contact their patients, the largest percentage (34 percent) of DCs who do not communicate with their patients thought contacting patients only for appointments was sufficient, while the largest percentage (38 percent) of DCs who do communicate with their patients thought contacting patients every 30 days was the best time interval.

The information in this survey should be used to better understand how DCs communicate with their patients outside of their practice. It should also be used to understand how DCs use EHR software to contact their patients.



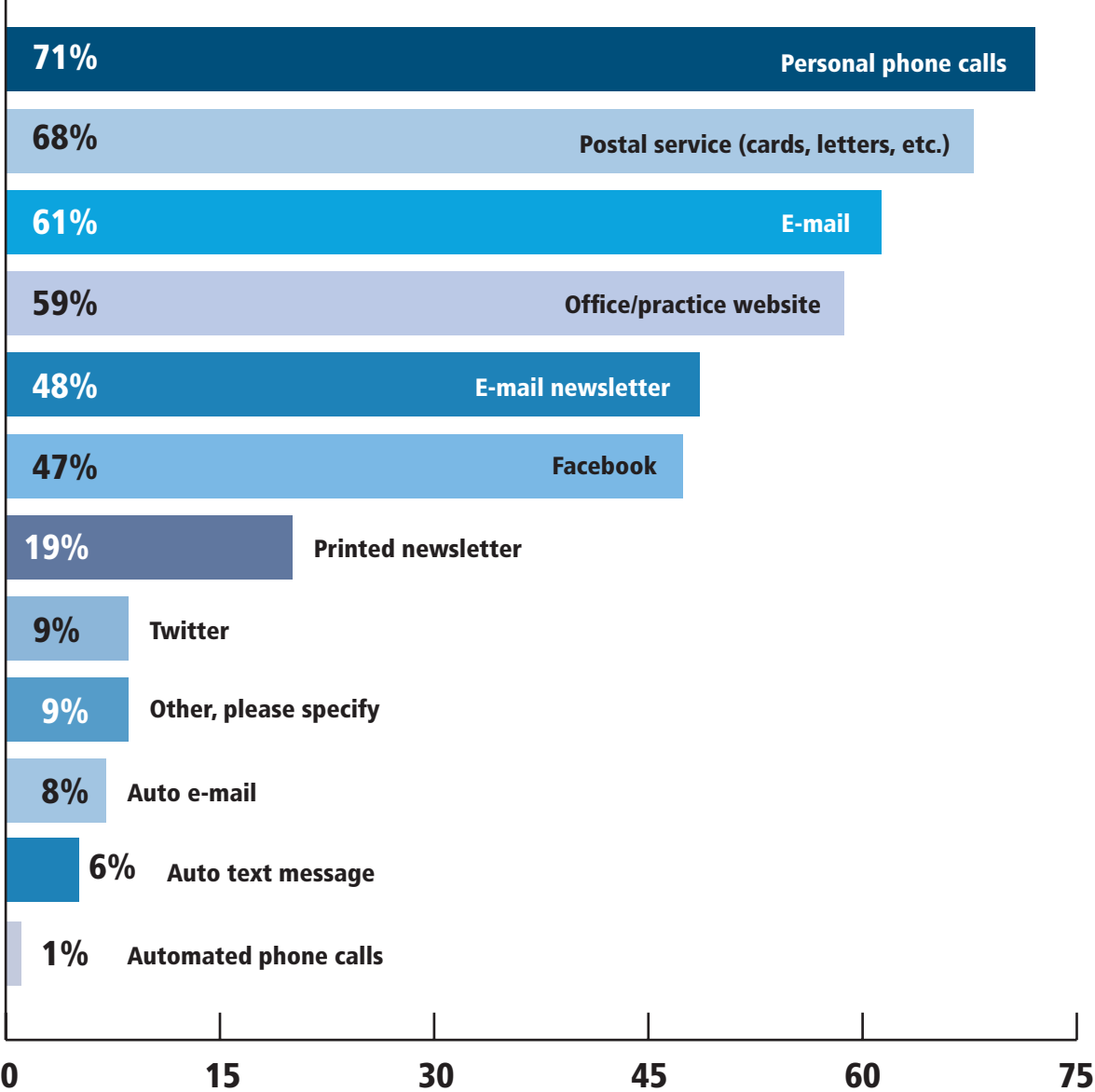
**1. Do you currently communicate with your patients outside of your practice?**

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**2. How do you communicate with your patients outside the office?**

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**3. If you contact your patients through electronic/social media/web services, how effective would you say your electronic communications have been for?**

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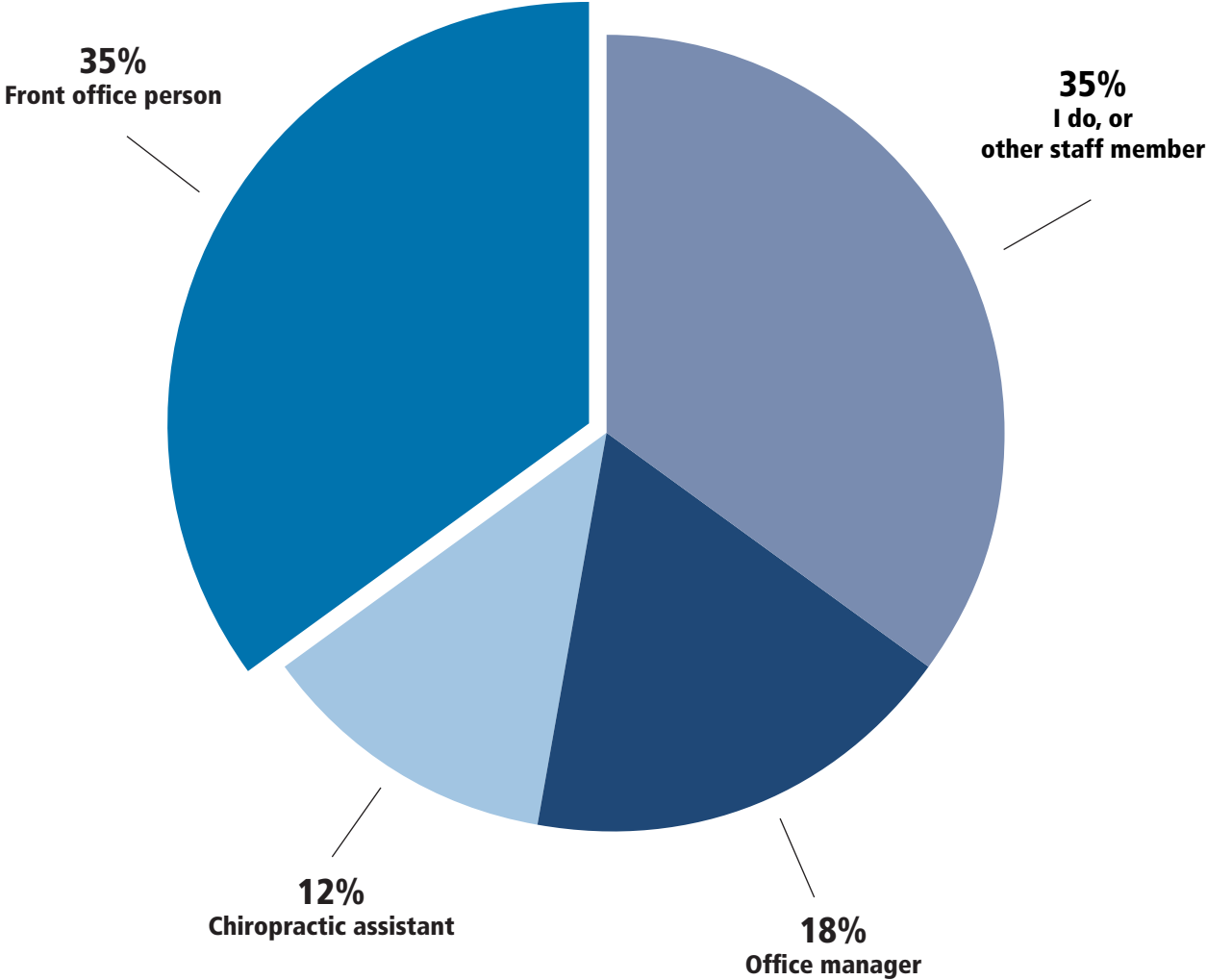
	<b>Gaining new patients</b>	<b>Reminding patients to come in regularly</b>	<b>Sparking patient referrals</b>
<b>Very effective</b>	7%	10%	7%
<b>Somewhat effective</b>	33%	34%	38%
<b>Somewhat ineffective</b>	22%	17%	20%
<b>Very ineffective</b>	15%	7%	10%
<b>I don't use these services but I think it would be beneficial</b>	15%	22%	16%
<b>I don't use these services and I don't think it would be beneficial</b>	8%	10%	9%



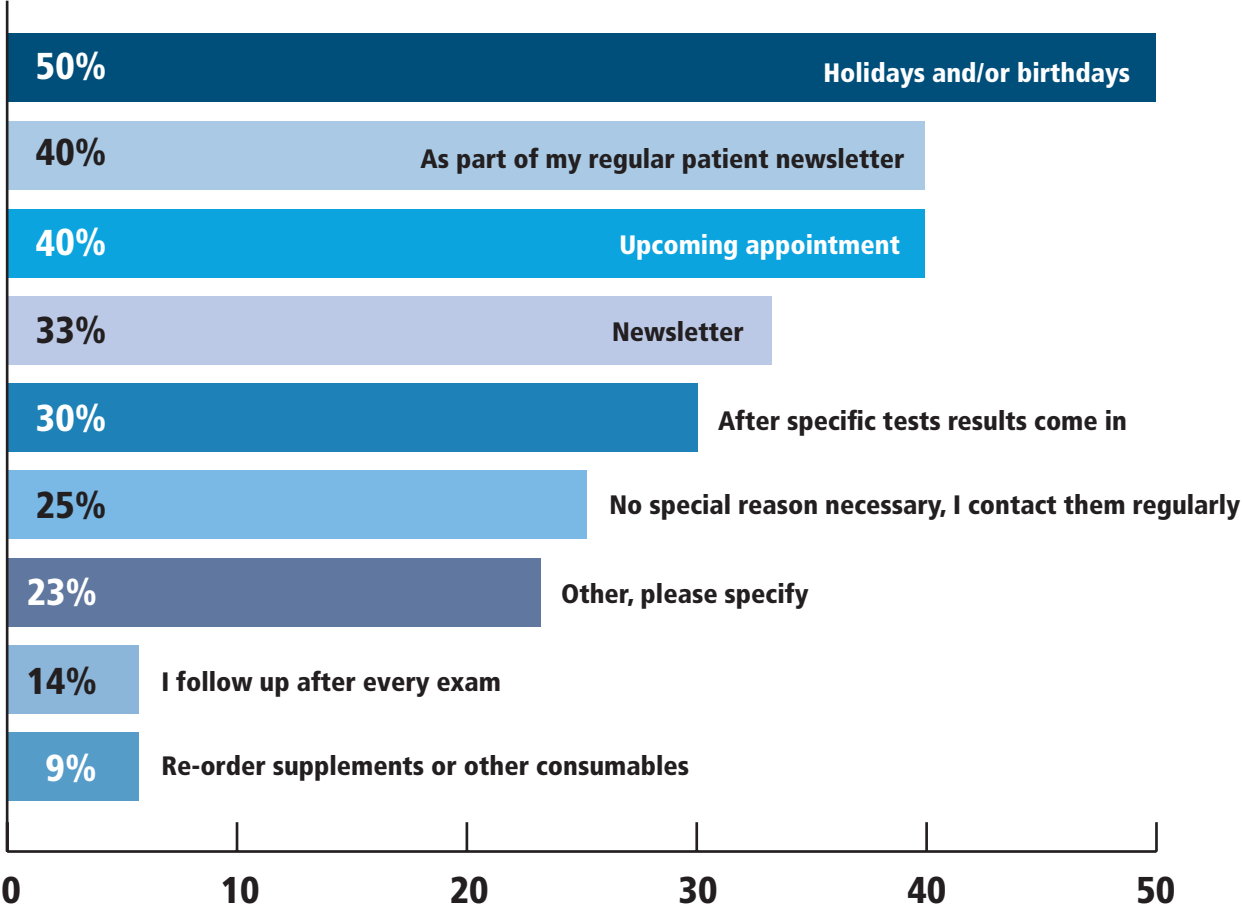


**4. Who is most responsible for communicating with your patients outside the office?**

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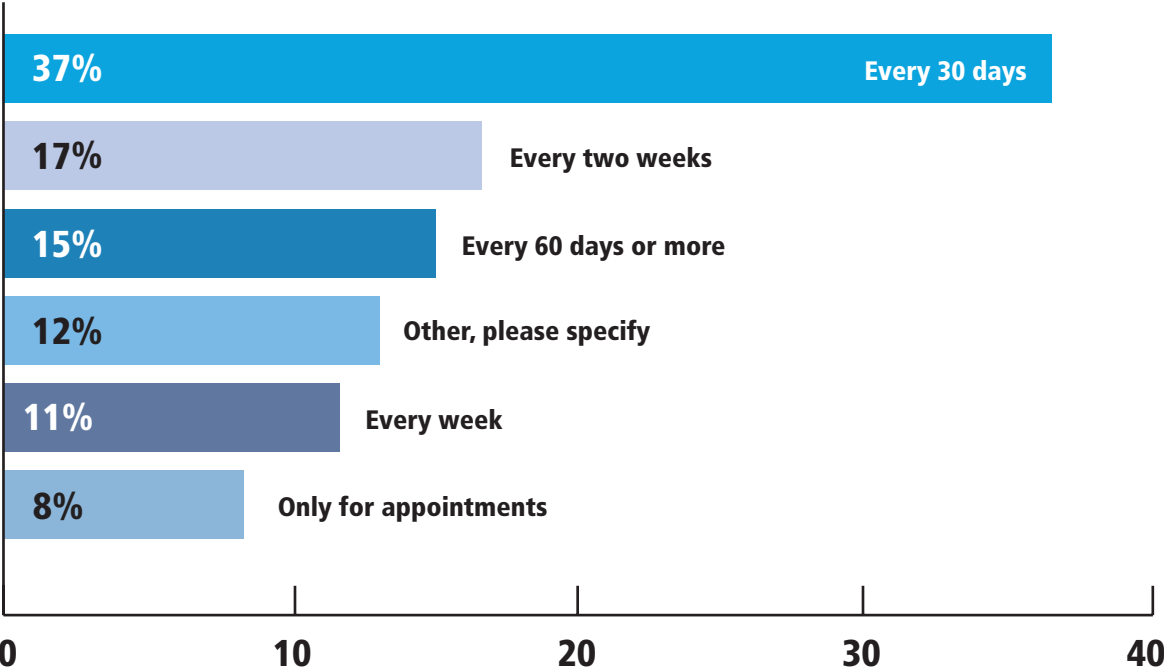


5. What prompts you to contact your patients outside of your practice?



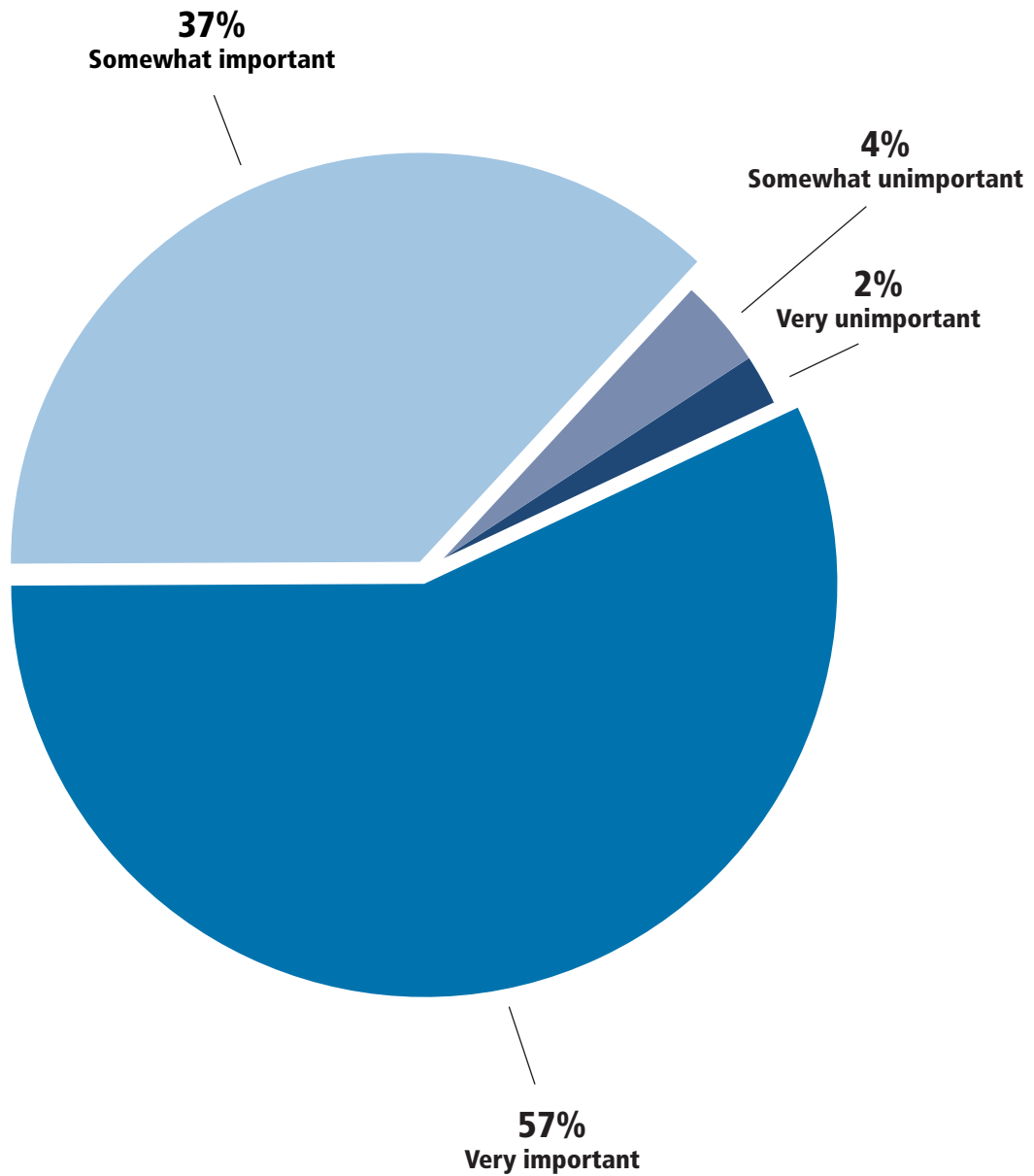
**6. What do you think is the best time interval in which to regularly contact your patients?**

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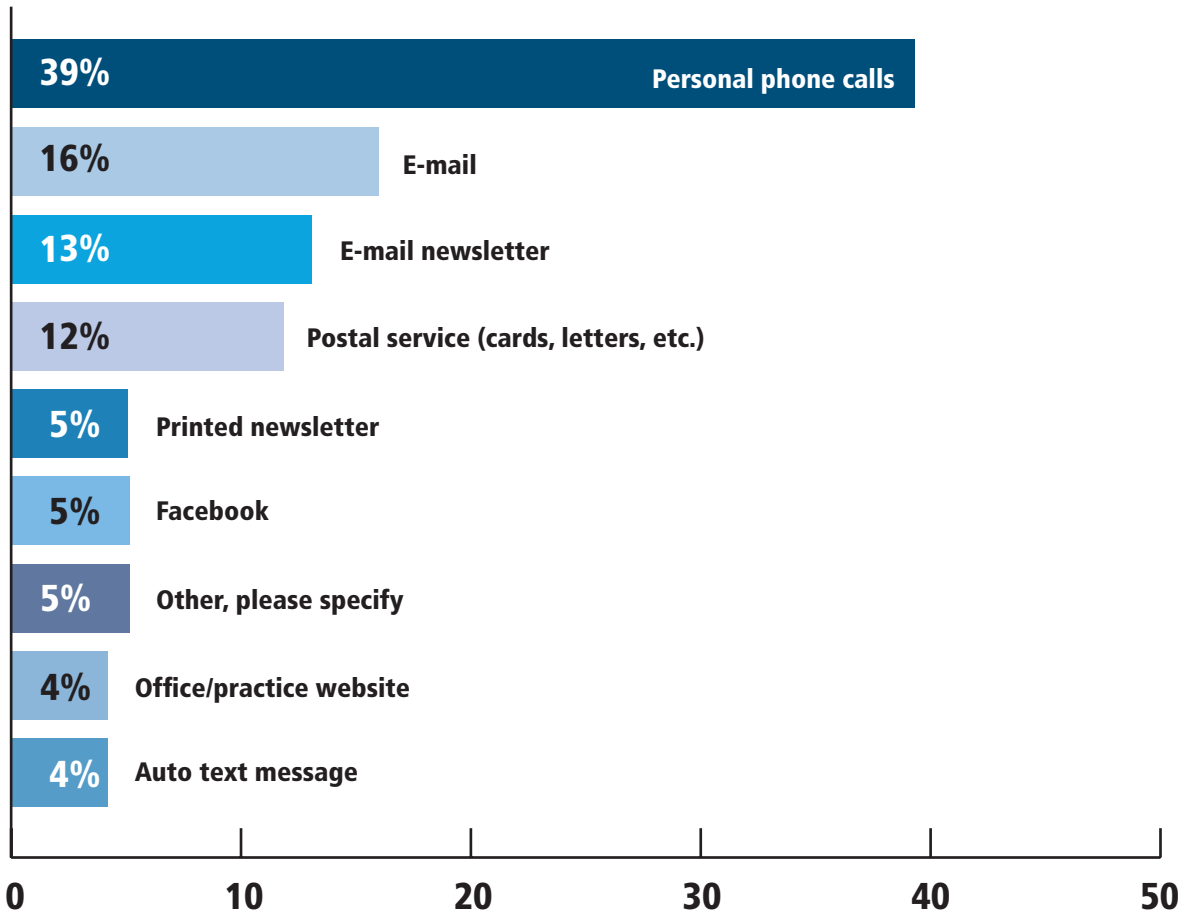
**7. How important is regular communication with your patients outside of your practice?**

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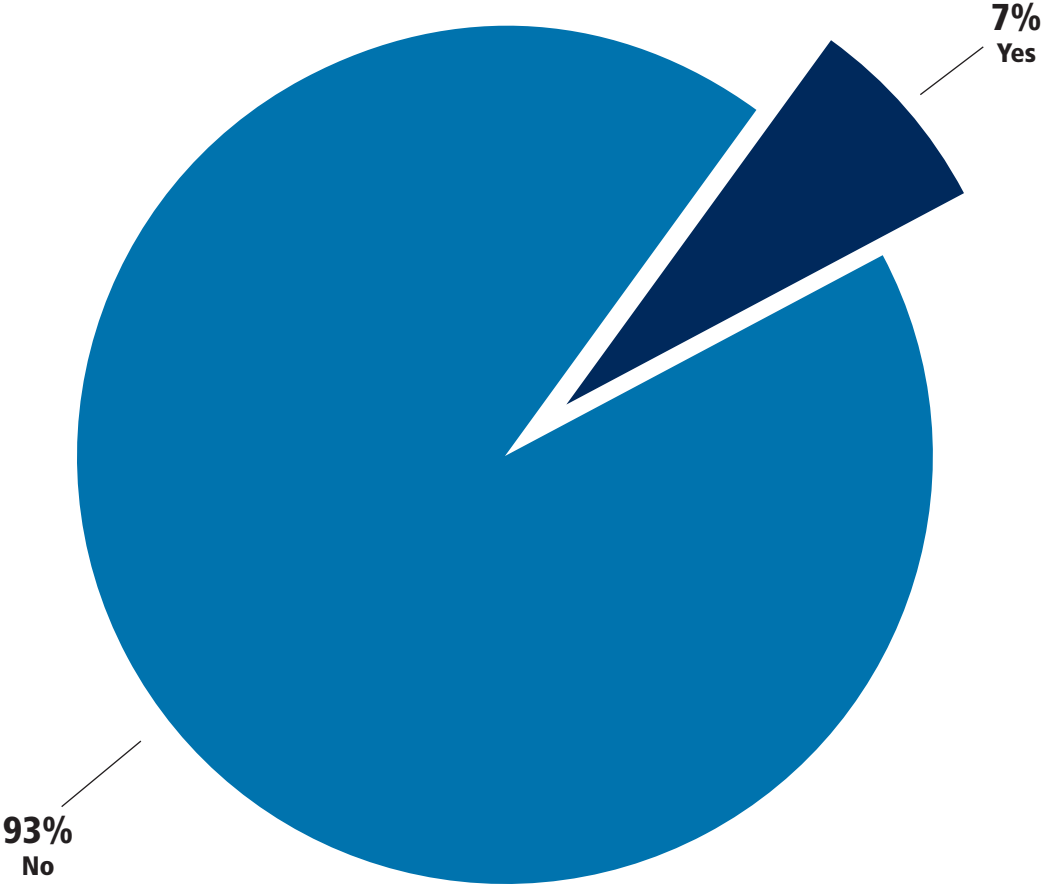
**8. In your opinion, what is the most effective way to communicate with your patients outside of your practice?**

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**9. Do you use EHR software to communicate to your patients outside the office?**

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## 10. Do you use EHR to do any of the following?

*DCs who communicate with patients outside of their practice and use EHR software*

	<b>Regularly</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Never</b>
<b>Appointment reminders</b>	62%	11%	27%
<b>Auto-appointment reminders via email or text message</b>	46%	11%	43%
<b>Distribution of general chiropractic and health information to patients</b>	34%	37%	29%
<b>Holiday and special occasion messages</b>	24%	42%	33%
<b>Personalized messages from the chiropractor to individual patients</b>	15%	41%	44%
<b>Reminders to replenish supplies of supplements, vitamins and other consumable products</b>	6%	28%	67%

