

The Role of Attitudes and Perceived Barriers to Sexual Health Communication: A Primary Care Perspective

Andrew Sanchez¹, Richard Shewchuk², Richard Sadovsky³, Stephen Burton¹, Chad Williamson¹, Maziar Abdolrasulnia¹

Institutions: ¹Outcomes, Inc., Birmingham, AL, ²University of Alabama at Birmingham, Birmingham, AL, ³SUNY-Downstate Medical Center, NY

Background

- ❖ Women frequently experience sexual concerns, often seeking the advice of their primary care physicians (PCPs) ^{1,2}
- ❖ PCPs may be reluctant to initiate a dialogue with their patients due to the sensitive nature of the topic³

The purpose of the study was to:

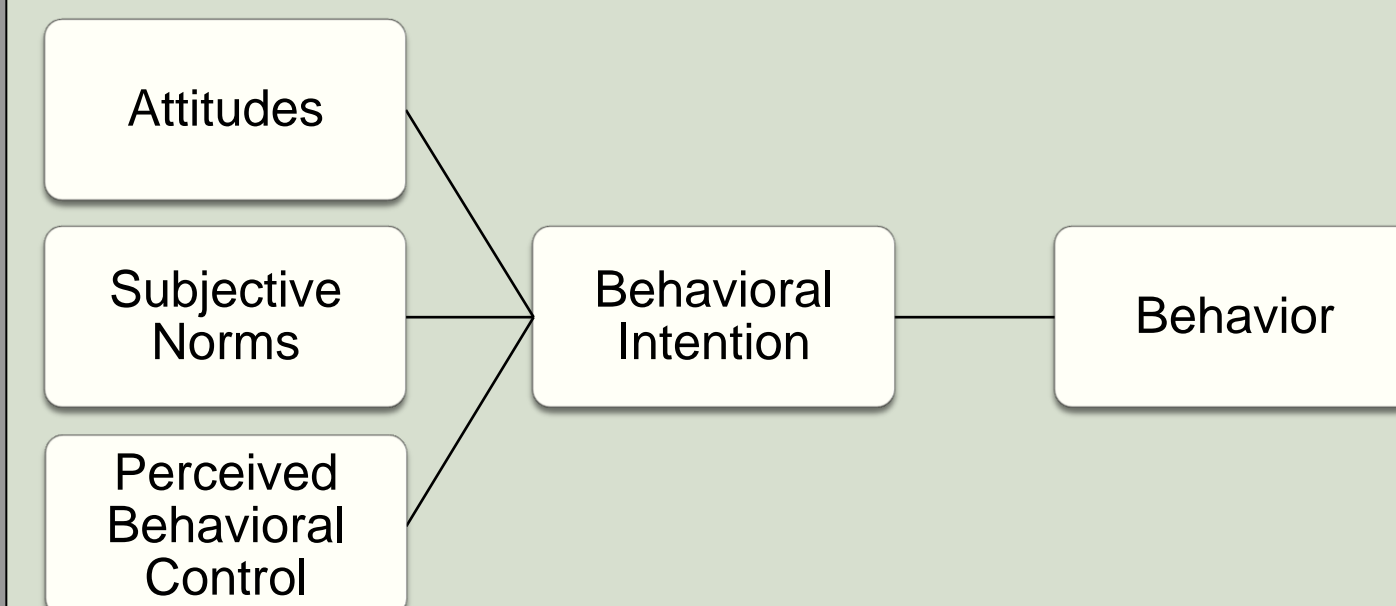
1. Apply the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to examine US PCPs' intentions to initiate a discussion with premenopausal patients about their sexual health.
2. To model the influence of attitudes and perceived barriers on US PCPs intentions to discuss sexual health with their patients

Methods

- ❖ Structured Focus Groups were conducted to understand physician attitudes and barriers to the initiation of a dialogue about sexual health with patients.
- ❖ Results were used in the development of a physician survey with physician experts in the field of sexual medicine.
- ❖ A series of patient case vignettes varying in patient gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, the type and amount of information voluntarily provided by the patient were developed to simulate common patients who might have concerns about their sexual health.
- ❖ Respondents were asked to determine how likely they would be to initiate a discussion with the patient described in the cases.
- ❖ Surveys were based on the TPB and distributed to a sample of US PCPs
- ❖ Responses were obtained from 146 US practicing family medicine and 139 US practicing internal medicine physicians enrolled in the online community between July and October of 2008

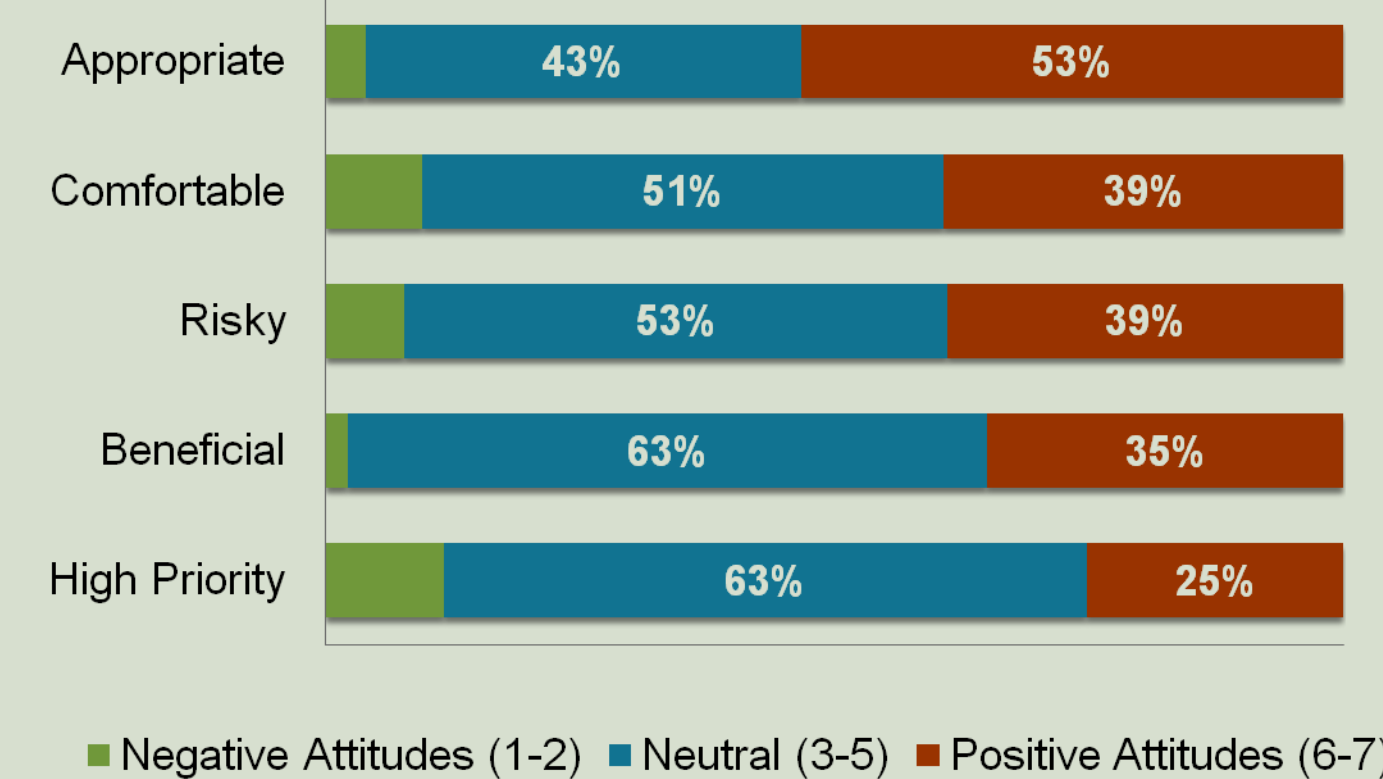
Theory of Planned Behavior

Behavior is associated with our attitudes, social normative pressures and perceived control⁴



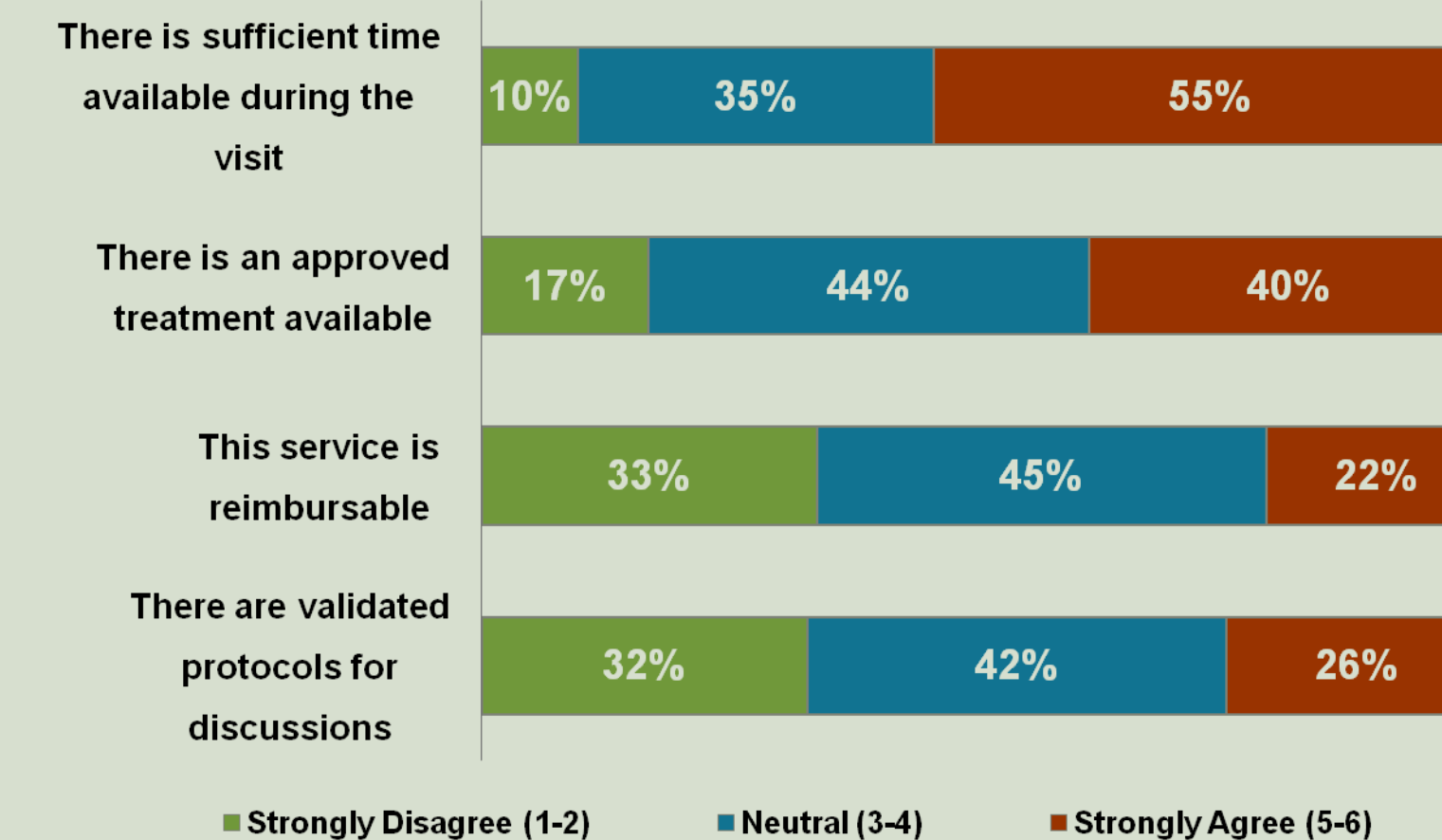
Attitudes Towards Initiating a Discussion

Generally, I think that initiating a discussion with my pre-menopausal patients regarding their level of sexual interest is:
(Measured on a scale of 1 to 7)



Barriers to Initiating a Discussion

I am more inclined to initiate a discussion about sexual health with my premenopausal patients if:
(Measures were on a 1 to 6 scale)



Conclusions

- ❖ PCPs hold positive attitudes towards initiating a discussion believing it is appropriate and feeling relatively comfortable doing so. However, PCPs feel it is a lower priority relative to other medical concerns they confront.
- ❖ PCPs would be more inclined to initiate a discussion if there was sufficient time during the visit and if there was an available approved treatment
- ❖ Attitudes play a more significant role in explaining PCP intention to initiate such a dialogue when compared to the impact of perceived barriers
- ❖ Results of the study suggest influencing attitudes and providing strategies in addressing barriers will likely motivate PCPs to initiate a discussion about sexual health with premenopausal patients
- ❖ Designing educational interventions focused on illustrating the value to the patient, and increasing the priority of initiating discussions as well as providing training on time management and successful treatment approaches is likely to motivate physicians to initiate discussions about sexual health with their patients

References

- ❖ ¹ Moreira ED Jr, Brock G, Glasser DB, Nicolosi A, Laumann EO, Paik A, Want T, Gingell C; GSSAB Investigators' Group. Help-seeking behaviour for sexual problems: the global study of sexual attitudes and behaviors. *Int J Clin Pract* 2005; 59(1):6-16.
- ❖ ² Wendt E, Hildingh C, Lidell E, Westerstahl A, Baigi A, Marklund B. Young women's sexual health and their views on dialogue with health professionals. *Acta Obstet Gynecol Scand* 2007;86(5):590-595.
- ❖ ³ Harsh V, McGarvey EL, Clayton AH. Physician attitudes regarding hypoactive sexual desire disorder in a primary care clinic: a pilot study. *J Sex Med* 2008;5(3):640-645.
- ❖ ⁴ Ajzen I. The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 1991;50:179-211

Acknowledgement

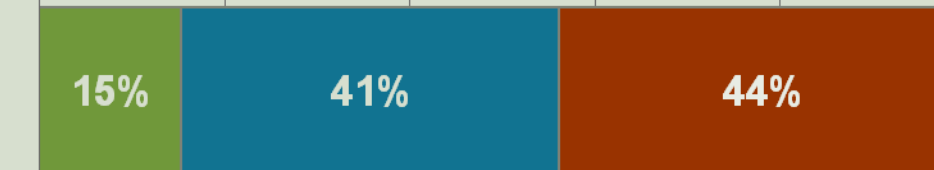
- ❖ We would like to thank Boehringer-Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc. for supporting this study
- ❖ We would like to thank Sermo for recruiting physicians included in our sample
- ❖ For additional information about the methods or findings, please contact:

Outcomes, Inc.
205.259.1500
outcomes@ceoutcomes.com

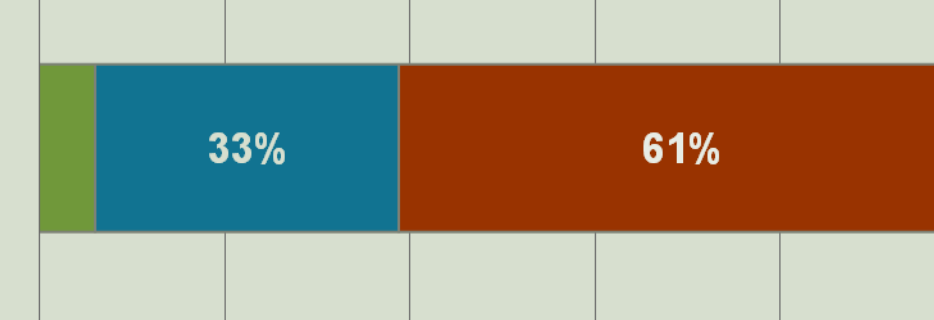
Behavioral Intention

How likely are you to initiate further discussion with this patient about matters concerning her sexual interest (Measured on a scale of 1 to 6)

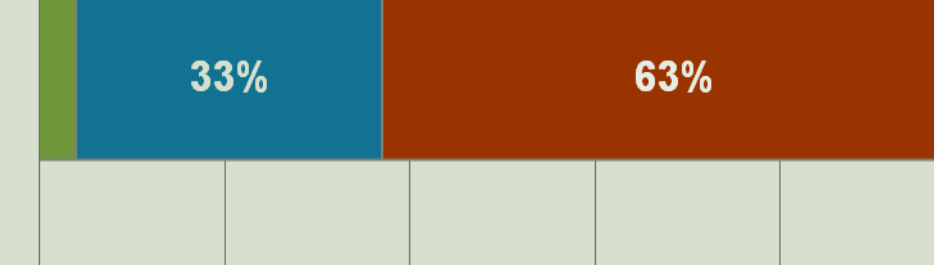
A 36-year-old lesbian whose new partner is concerned about her lack of sexual interest



A 43-year-old married woman with two small children who notes that since the birth of her second child she has had decreased sex drive but does enjoy sex when it occurs



A 50-year-old married white female who, as an incidental part of a regular visit, notes a decrease in sexual responsiveness.



A 29-year-old married black female who never feels like having sex, avoids sex, and her marriage is suffering for it.



Predictors of Intention

- ❖ Variables measuring attitudes and barriers to initiating a discussion were used as predictors of physician intention to create the predictive model
- ❖ A linear regression revealed that physician attitudes and perceived barriers significantly predict PCP responses when asked if they would initiate a discussion about sexual health with the premenopausal patients described in the case vignettes $F(9,284) = 18.485, p < .001$
- ❖ Physician attitudes and perceived barriers alone explain 36% of physician intention to initiate the discussion
- ❖ Attitudes contributed the most in explaining intention with comfort level ($\beta = .341, p < .001$) contributing most to the models ability to explain the variation
- ❖ 55% of PCPs strongly agree that sufficient time during visits would increase the likelihood that they would initiate a discussion. However, available time was not found to be a significant predictor of intention to initiate a discussion ($\beta = .015, p = .796$)