

**A Renewed Outlook on Healing: Holistic Healing and the Effect it Has on Health Care  
Today**

**Abstract**

Holistic healing is crucial to the healing process, yet many physicians and patients must realize its full impact. This approach could change the entire healing process when understood and appropriately implicated. This research aims to understand the extent to which physicians and patients embrace and implement holistic healing practices. A survey was created, which targeted physicians working within the healthcare system to unpack their personal views on holistic healing. Patients who provided insight into their experiences surrounding holistic healing participated in interviews. Compelling results appeared. Physicians' engagement directly correlates with patients' involvement in their healing process. Even though physicians and patients see holistic healing as incredibly valuable, there must be more intentionality when executing this form of care within healthcare systems. In conclusion, the research provided results that point to discrepancies within our healthcare systems. One can expand this study by researching how the broader medical culture directly influences a physician's role in a patient's healing journey. Something as simple as the increased implementation of holistic healing practices in medical schools could initiate change through heightened awareness.

**Literature Review**

Medicine overall is a highly beneficial field created to be a beacon of hope and healing. However, there is one specific in which medicine has begun to stray from its original mission

(Hutchinson et al., 2009). If completely grasped by patients and physicians alike, this weak area within medicine could renew and shape the standard of practice. Though often overlooked, the concept of holistic healing has life-changing effects that reach beyond just physical healing (Benor, 2017). There are simple steps surrounding the idea of whole-person care that can drastically improve the results of patient and physician progress toward healthy recoveries (Lowes, 1988). A small 20% of healing comes from medical treatment agents such as surgery, drugs, or acupuncture. In comparison, 80% of healing comes from a highly personal and relational approach to constructing a treatment that the patient owns (Jonas, 2018). Reinforcing the idea that a holistic approach to medicine, which encompasses every aspect of our being - physical, mental, relational, and spiritual - significantly impacts the overall success of the healing process (Benor, 2017).

A crucial step to achieving a more holistic outlook within medicine is determining the difference between curing and healing. While curing and healing play crucial roles in medicine, curing focuses more on placing treatment within another's hands, while healing is taking it into one's own hands (Hutchinson et al., 2009). Knowing this difference is crucial. When committed to healing rather than simply curing, the patient is willing to change and focus on the entirety of their care and is committed to creating a difference within themselves (Hutchinson et al., 2009). Unfortunately, these two concepts have become tangled into one definition, placing healing into simply wound healing, treatments, and checkups. Nevertheless, when seen in its most influential and original form, healing should be an intervention to create healing that leads to greater wholeness, medicine that treats physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional health (Benor, 2017). By knowing the difference between curing and healing, it is essential to define and understand precisely what true healing is.

Multiple studies have emphasized the importance of relationships in the healing process, especially as patients have a considerable role in their outcomes. Patients and clinicians participated in focus group discussions on healing in an experiment. The participant's responses revealed themes. The overall idea was that healing should be spiritual, emotional, and physiological, be a restorative process, require acceptance, and include an interpersonal relationship with the care provider (Hsu et al., 2008). Another article revealed that if a patient activates their healing and gets their physician involved and invested, their healing has a more significant potential to be more effective and safer (Jonas, 2018). However, simultaneously, the physician's role in the patient's healing is drastic.

The physician often sets the tone for the patient's healing process. Physicians have pressure to cure sickness while also at the same time having to consider holistic care (Egnew, 2009). With an emphasis on holistic care, physicians need to embody the role of a healer to encourage and support acceptance, relationships, compassion, and narratives (Egnew, 2009). The role culture plays in how physician treats their patients is vast, too. The culture of medicine has slowly grown away from holistic healing, and it plays a role in how the physician provides care for the patient (Shanafelt et al., 2019). A specific example that reveals the lack of relational room created within the healthcare culture and how the connection between the physician and patient is crucial is how physicians who listen to their patients promote and increase the healing rate. Not only does it involve the physician in the patient's path of healing, but it also encourages the patient to take ownership of their healing. For example, "Another participant commented that the mere act of the physician listening is empowering to the patient as it motivates them to take ownership over their health". (Jagosh et al., 2011, p. 372). The physician sets the tone for holistic healing and the overall healing effect.

The approach the physician takes to heal drastically affects how the patient responds. When the physician intentionally journeys alongside the patient, the patient's desire to adhere to their care plan increases, encompassing the physician's orders (Lowes, 1988). Therefore, when healing is a priority, the patient does not feel forced to follow prescriptions and rules but feels personally connected to their physician and medical journey (Jagosh et al., 2011).

Understanding how holistic healing has directly impacted medical practices, patient engagement, and the intentionality of healthcare culture requires further research. This study aims to examine the correlation between the experiences of practicing physicians and patients with whole-person care. The current implementation of holistic care and the benefits of the healing journey were examined through the distribution of surveys and interviews, which provided information to investigate further implications of this topic in medicine. The relevant information focused on broad answers, personal opinions, and experiences. The population included physicians at the AdventHealth Orlando, AdventHealth Altamonte, CentraCare, and Loma Linda University Medical Center campuses. This research aims to contribute valuable insights that will enhance the intentionality of holistic care in daily medical practices.

## **Methods**

### **Themes**

The results of this research revealed significant themes from the data. As established through the literature review, holistic healing is not only an intentional practice of medicine but a practice that creates an atmosphere for proper healing. With an emphasis on physician and patient perspectives and experiences, this research reveals the interconnected relationship between the physician's practice and the patient's success. Physicians documented the shift in

medicine to focus on only curing, with a lack of holistic healing. The overall culture of medicine has shifted towards efficiency over intentionality. However, the research revealed that the physician's approach to care significantly impacts their patient's response and involvement, again stressing the need for whole-person care in modern medicine. Patients wish to receive intentional, holistic care, but only some physicians practice whole-person care. While over 450 physicians received this survey, only 14 responses were received. That is approximately a 3% response rate. If physicians cannot allocate time to participate in a survey on holistic healing, it raises concerns about their level of passion and commitment to this practice of medicine.

### **Instruments**

This study aimed to discover and understand the role holistic healing plays in healthcare. The primary purpose of this research was to understand physicians' perspectives, especially those ages thirty and up. The most efficient approach was to gather information from physicians through a survey. With guidance from professors knowledgeable of research requirements and structure, input from medical personnel to shape the questions, and drawing from the gaps in the literature review, the application of this information constructed an effective survey. The survey design prioritized conciseness, directness, and thoroughness.

While most of the survey used new survey instruments, existing instruments aided the creation of the scenario questions, formulated using previous scenario questions, and revised for holistic healing (Smith, 2016). The survey went through multiple rounds of analysis and revision. This section consisted of open-ended questions, as understanding the physicians' detailed thought processes was the primary goal. The second part of the survey consisted of nine close-ended questions, explicitly targeting the physicians' perspective on the prevalence and importance of

holistic healing. The survey concluded with personal inventory questions for age, gender, occupation, specialty, and how long the physician had been working in their occupation. The survey length was 15 minutes, as was mentioned to each participant beforehand in the email. Any licensed physician was eligible to take part in the 17-question survey.

Multiple heads of departments were contacted and provided the survey link. They shared the survey with their fellow employees/physicians. The survey expanded beyond the AdventHealth campuses, including the campuses of CentraCare and Loma Linda physicians. In total, over 450 physicians received the survey through their emails. Furthermore, four past patients were contacted and interviewed in person and over the phone during the research. Again, with the assistance of professors and medical personnel, the interview was designed to understand the patient's view on holistic healing and its prevalence within medicine. The interview did not use an existing interview instrument but contained entirely new questions unique to the research. A pilot interview provided insight and guidance to revise the final format used for the official interviews. As suggested, the interview began with an introduction to allow the interviewee a deeper understanding of the research. Each open-ended question allowed the participant to share their thoughts and experiences freely. Each interview took approximately 15 minutes per person.

Over six weeks, survey responses were collected, and five interviews took place. The survey data was collected on an iPad and analyzed using the survey program through Google Forms. The survey results did not disclose names to protect the physicians' anonymity. Documented notes and audio recordings during the interviews allowed reflection upon the results when analyzing and summarizing outcomes. Both occurred upon the interviewee's permission.

Each interview participant remained anonymous in the written-up results to protect their anonymity.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Data Overview**

*Quantitative Analysis.* Results from the survey and interviews were collected. The survey remained open for six weeks to accommodate the physician's busy schedule. Various specialties were represented in the survey responses, such as Internal Medicine, Urgent Care, Preventive Care, and Family Medicine. All fourteen of the responses were selected for analysis. The survey was conducted through Google Forms, and an initial analysis was completed through Google Form's survey program. Cross-tabulation analysis was used to correlate the responses to form conclusions. The figures were created through Microsoft Excel and Tables through Microsoft Word.

*Qualitative Analysis.* The second research instrument, interviews, allowed a deeper understanding of patients' experiences in the healthcare setting. The four individuals interviewed varied in age, location, and experience. The interviewees included Participant 1, a female in high school, Participant 2, a female in college, Participant 3, a male in college, and Participant 4, an adult female working in the medical field. Since the survey targeted physicians, it became critical to hear the perspective of the patients receiving care. For this research, it was essential to understand their view on holistic healing and if they witnessed it being practiced within healthcare. For analyses, the interviews were transcribed verbatim. The experiences were summarized and analyzed, to formulate themes.

## Results

### Medicine Focused on Healing vs. Physicians Focused on Holistic Healing

The correlation between the focus on holistic healing in medicine and physicians living out holistic healing within medicine was an exciting component of the results. The percentage of respondents who said medicine is focused more on curing for question 4 (66.7%) correlated to the respondents who said physicians are only sometimes focused on holistic healing for question 5 (61.5%). In contrast, the percentage of respondents who said medicine focuses on healing and curing for question 4 (33.3%) correlated to those who said physicians focus on holistic healing most times for question 5 (23.1%).

**Table 1**

*Correlation between the focus of medicine on holistic healing and physicians living out holistic healing within healthcare*

Question Number	Participants	% of medicine focused on curing (4) and % of physicians sometimes focused on holistic healing (5)	% of medicine focused on both (4) and % of physicians most times focused on holistic healing (5)
4	12	66.7%	33.3%
5	13	66.7%	23.1%

*Note: Author, 2020*

Do physicians notice a correlation between the overall outlook on holistic healing in medicine and the actual focus on practicing holistic healing? A higher percentage leaned towards medicine's emphasis on only curing, with a similar percentage revealing that physicians only sometimes practice holistic healing. This supports how physicians' practice of medicine affects



their practice and the overall culture of medicine. If physicians truly practiced holistic healing all the time instead of sometimes, how would the focus of holistic healing in medicine change?

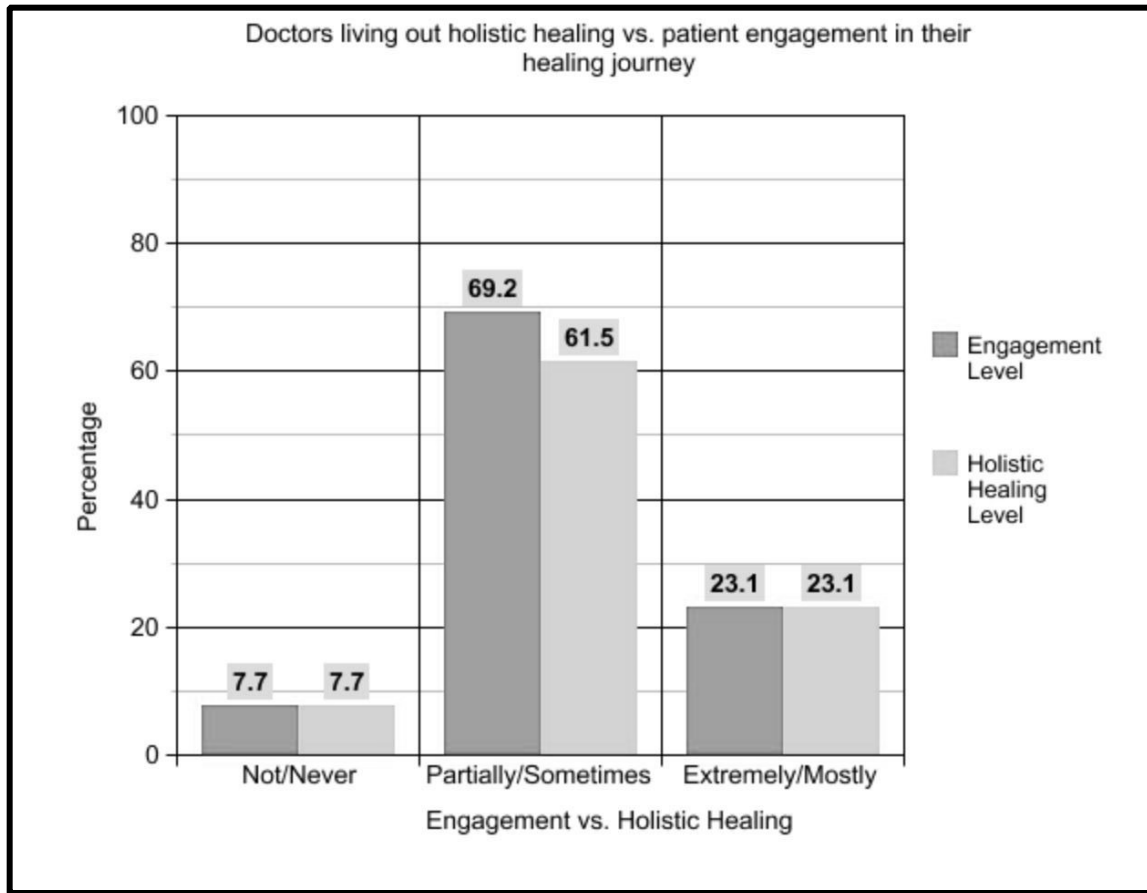
Something else to note is that the culture of medicine could significantly impact the physicians. The medical field's evolution shows a trend towards more efficiency and less intentionality. This points clearly to the fact that culture might have more of an impact on physicians than the physicians have on the culture. These percentages reveal in a powerful way that the culture of healthcare and how physicians practice medicine correlate in many ways. Holistic healing should begin within offices, small practices, and hospital rooms, but there needs to also be a change in the culture for there to be a change in the practice.

### **Physicians Living Out Holistic Healing vs. Patient Engagement in Their Healing Journey**

There is a notable similarity between the percentage of physicians only sometimes living out holistic healing (61.5%) and that of patients partially engaged in their healing (69.2%). Likewise, there was an exactly similar percentage between physicians most times living out holistic healing (23.1%) and patients highly engaged in their healing (23.1%). While these percentages are not entirely equivalent, they have a substantial similarity.

#### **Figure 1**

*The relationship between the engagement level of patients in their healing journey and the level of holistic healing lived out by the physicians.*



*Note: Author, 2020*

This brings up an interesting question. How does the physician’s ability to carry out holistic healing relate to the patient’s willingness to be involved in their healing journey? The percentages ignite the question that perhaps holistic care has a more significant effect on the patient than believed. It is seen through these percentages that a higher percentage voted that physicians sometimes live out holistic healing and that patients are only partially engaged in their healing journey.

Physicians play a considerable role in their patient’s journey. Holistic healing focuses on every aspect of the patient, which has overlooked effects. Patients who feel understood, essential, and listened to will be more eager to involve themselves in their healing journey. These results are somewhat surprising yet expected at the same time. It points to the fact that physicians

significantly impact their patients. In addition, patients can significantly affect the physicians. If a patient is unwilling to be involved in their treatment, why would the physician take time out of their busy day to show intentionality for a recipient who will not appreciate it? A partnership between the patient and the physician affects holistic healing in medicine.

### **Patient's Perspective on the Importance of the Physician's Engagement**

The information gained from the surveys influenced the questions to the patients interviewed. This question was, "Do you believe the physician's approach to healing (specifically holistic) influences their patients? Do you have any examples or explanations?". Each respondent interviewed emphasized how they believed strongly that the physician's approach to healing directly affects how the patient responds. All four responses conveyed that the way the physician responds to the healing process will often have a related outcome to how the patient responds to the healing process. Throughout the interview, they explained how they and others look to their physicians for guidance. If they can trust the physician and know the physician is involved in their healing journey, they are more likely to be involved as well. Responding to a question about how the physician's approach to healing influences the patients interviewed, each participant provided valuable insight.

Participant 1: "I think it has a major effect on the patients because, number one, it is showing that the doctors care more than just prescribing medicine and trying to get another room freed for the next patient."

Participant 2: "Instead of fixing the temporary problem, which would be the physical, they fix something that will allow that patient to recover many times over."

Participant 3: "If the physician is not optimistic even though the chances of full recovery might be small, then that creates the patient to not be as optimistic."

Participant 4: "Absolutely, always. Most people look to their physicians for plans and direction, so if the physician prioritizes holistic healing, then the patient will have a great probability of doing this in their own lives."

Not only did each respondent emphasize the importance of holistic healing they wish to receive, but they also continually restated that the more involved the physician is, the more involved they are. The physician is not just someone who provides treatment. They set the tone for care. The fact that patients wish to receive a higher level of involvement in their treatment points back to the fact that physician involvement should be at a different level than it should be. No respondent who had been a patient noted a feeling of having been holistically treated. As Participant 1 stated, "When I receive most healthcare, I do not feel that it is prioritized. I do not think holistic healing is prioritized".

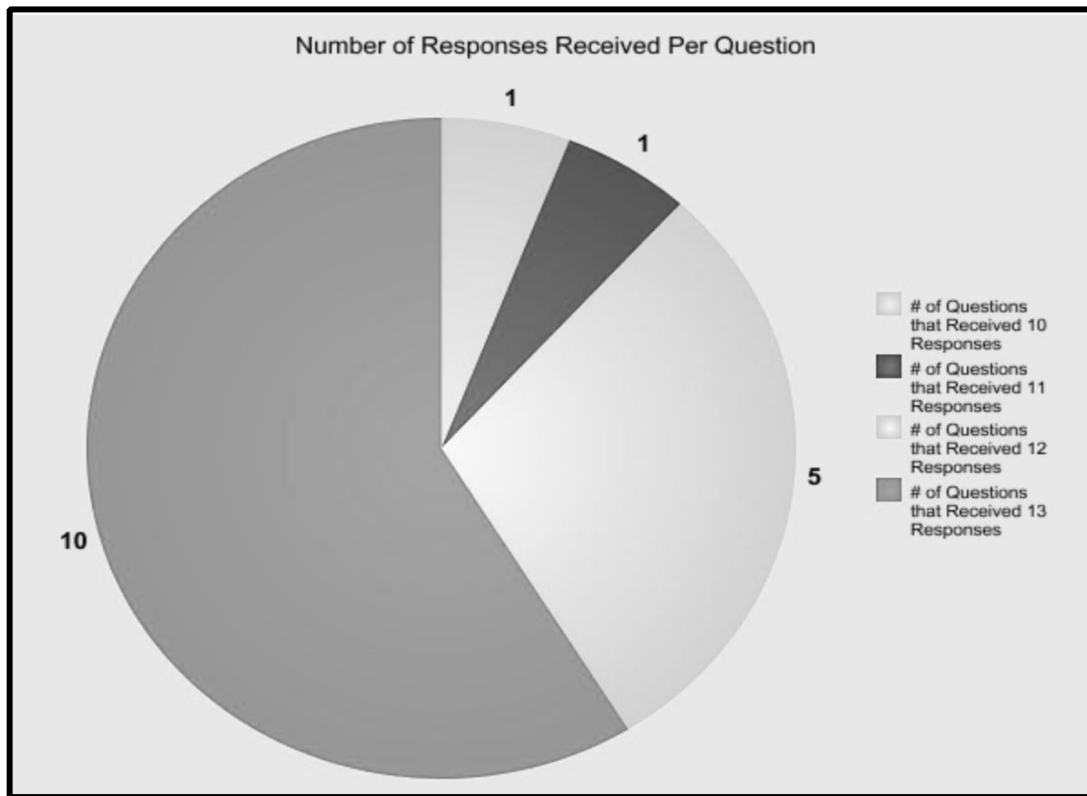
### **Number of Respondents to the Survey**

Upon receiving a holistic healing survey, physicians should be eager to take it. Though physicians have a lot on their shoulders and are incredibly busy, enhancing their care in how they provide treatment should be a crucial part of their daily routine. As mentioned, the survey

reached over 450 physicians at AdventHealth alone. Far more were received by physicians at Loma Linda and CentraCare. Out of all these physicians involved, only 14 responded. Interestingly, out of those 14, not all completed each question from the scenario, survey, and personal inventory sections.

**Figure 2**

*Number of responses to each survey question received.*



*Note: Author, 2020*

At first, these results were frustrating. Why were so few responses received? Yes, it could have been a coincidence, but at the same time, it may point back to the argument that physicians are not involved and as intentional as they should be in their patients' healing journey. Physicians, focused on their patients, should be entirely committed to enhancing the care they provide. However, if they are unwilling to take a short survey on holistic healing, how can we

know they are intentional in even the tiny details of a patient's day-to-day care plan? In the end, medicine always goes back to the patient.

Patients need to feel like they are the center of their care. It begins with the physician. Holistic care must start with the caregiver and continue to the one receiving treatment. The physician sets the tone for not only individual treatment but the culture of healthcare.

### **Conclusions**

The research conducted reveals essential themes about medicine. The research analyses identified the gaps found in the practice of healing. There is a clear relation between the physician's intentionality in practice and the patient's reception to care. While the survey and interview participants identified the necessity of holistic care, the results indicate that physicians still need to implement this into their practice and that patients need to recognize it as actively practiced. While whole-person care is mostly absent in the culture of medicine, the importance and understanding of the difference it could make seem to be understood, especially by the physicians.

The results of this research share similar themes to those found in the literature review, though pulled from real-life experiences and perspectives. Previous research identifies the importance of whole-person care, and this research, through responses from both the physicians and the patients, recognized that while there is a significant lack of holistic care, it not only could positively impact the culture of care but directly change the healing process to be more effective (Benor, 2017). Another emphasis from the literature review was the difference between curing and healing (Hutchinson et al., 2009). Many of the physicians who participated in the survey for this research identified that the culture of medicine is focused more on curing than healing.

Knowing that holistic care is rooted in healing, as acknowledged by the physicians, the responses emphasizing medical practice's focus on only curing are concerning as they detect a tangible gap in the culture of care.

Additionally, the correlation between physician care and the patient's involvement was identified in previous research. However, the correlation was made through non-human subject research or an extremely specific niche research measure, such as the importance of listening in the patient-physician relationship (Lowes, 1988). The instruments of this research focused on the broad correlation through the perspectives of the physician and the patient by pulling from their real-life experiences. The results reveal a notable correlation between physicians practicing holistic healing and their patients' engagement in their healing. The physician's involvement directly impacts the patient's engagement. As the practice of holistic care increased, so did patient engagement.

Though themes influenced this research in the literature review, the differentiating impact was through the intersection of the patients' and physicians' perspectives. The study of whole-person care is broad and sometimes nonspecific to human participants or the medical field, as seen in the literature review. This research addresses the varying aspects of whole-person care through the survey, designed alongside professors and physicians, interviews created to identify the patient's experiences, and scenario questions, intentionality articulated to understand the physician's insight surrounding whole-person care. It intertwines the themes from the literature review into one study while simultaneously focusing on the interpersonal implications of whole-person care. No research has thoroughly investigated the physician's grasp of holistic healthcare and the prevalence of its application in the field of medicine. Holistic healing has been studied for centuries, but the lack of implementation of whole-person care in medicine, as mentioned in

the literature review, was identified explicitly through this research. Physicians and patients alike must realize that their approach to healing has a life-changing effect on all areas of medicine:

The intentionality of the physicians, the engagement of the patients, and the want for improvement alter the effect of whole-person care in medicine. The analyses of the survey and interview responses in this research should inspire a transformative shift among physicians.

There is a need for our medical system to recenter around the physician-patient relationship. This change begins through intentionality. Holistic healing is not just a quick procedure or a medical prescription. Addressing the absence of holistic healing in medicine, as identified in the research, requires emphasizing physicians' daily commitment to reshaping the future of healthcare with a focus on holistic care. In addition to further research, potential alterations include:

- Setting a daily patient limit for physicians to ensure more comprehensive care.
- Revising medical school curricula to incorporate alternative approaches.
- Providing a period for physical and mental recovery
- Prioritizing patient education on self-care

While it may take longer and be more tedious, holistic healing has lasting impacts on the patient and how receptive they are to improving their circumstances. Imagine the world and what healthcare would look like if the culture of medicine focused on more than procedures and quick treatments. Imagine a world where healthcare focuses on the patient's entirety, mind, body, and soul, practicing intentional, holistic care.



### **Limitations**

This research was specifically designed for a particular group of physicians. One limitation was the need for more participants. Only so many physicians were first willing to take the survey but also be honest about the topics surrounding holistic care. The limited responses, by far, were the most significant struggle faced. Even though the survey reached over 450 physicians, only 14 responses were received, with 13 completed. Analyzing the results and creating an inclusive conclusion based on the findings was challenging.

The original research was structured to interview physicians for the second research instrument. Scheduling interviews proved to be even more challenging than conducting surveys. The decision to interview past patients instead created easier accessibility and revealed fascinating findings, adding to the analysis of the physician-patient relationship.

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**Appendix A: Survey****Table 1***Survey Layout*

<b>Question Number</b>	<b>Question</b>	<b>Question Category</b>	<b>Answer Type</b>
1	See Figure 1.1	Scenario	How do you respond?
2	See Figure 1.2	Scenario	What would you do?
3	What is your focus when practicing medicine?	Content	Open-ended
4	In your own words, define holistic healing.	Content	Open-ended
5	In health care, on a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being not important and 10 being extremely important), how important do you believe holistic healing is?	Content	1-10
6	Do you believe medicine is more focused on simply curing or holistically healing?	Content	Curing, Both, or Healing
7	The explanation for the previous question	Content	Open-ended
8	Do you witness other physicians living out holistic healthcare and healing?	Content	Never, Sometimes, Most Times, or Always
9	The explanation for the previous question	Content	Open-ended
10	On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being not important and 10 being extremely important), how important do you believe the physician's role is in shaping the patient's healing journey?	Content	1-10
11	How would you characterize the current state of patient engagement in their healing journey?	Content	Not Engaged, Partially Engaged, and Extremely Engaged
12	Occupation?	Personal Inventory	Open-ended
13	Specialty?	Personal Inventory	Open-ended
14	Which healthcare system are you employed by?	Personal Inventory	Open-ended
15	How long have you been practicing medicine?	Personal Inventory	Open-ended
16	Sex?	Personal Inventory	Female or Male
17	Age?	Personal Inventory	Open-ended

**Figure 1.1***Scenario Question 1*

You have been working in an ambulatory urgent care setting for the past 7 years. Typically, there are three healthcare providers at any given time to manage the large and increasing patient load. However, it is becoming a trend for the administrative staff only to have one or two providers to manage the typical 80 patients in your 8-hour shift.

Early one Monday morning as you enter the urgent care, you notice that the waiting room is unusually full which has set the tone for a stressful day. You become internally frustrated about the situation after the office manager said that the only other provider who is scheduled this morning has called in sick. You become irritated with the office manager and tell him that it is unacceptable to only have one medical provider for this volume of patients and it is not professional for you to have to rush through patients, potentially increasing the risk for medical error.

As you think about the roomful of waiting patients and the probable difficulty of sorting out the cause of this particular patient's troubles, the patient demands, "I'm in a lot of pain. I've also been waiting over 45 minutes for you to get here, what were you doing? Sleeping in?"

How do you respond?

**Figure 1.2***Scenario Question 2*

You are a physician working in an indigent primary care clinic. Unfortunately, the budget continues to get cut and you are expected to see more and more patients with less reimbursement. You are struggling with these expectation as you are not able to provide the quality patient care in the little time you have with your patients. You have not received a pay increase in the past 5 years, but your work load continues to increase quarterly and your allowed time off continues to decrease to accommodate the large patient load.

You continually have guilt over your inability to connect your patients with appropriate resources due to poor funding of the facility and are unable to successfully prescribe appropriate medications because the ideal drug is often too expensive. This reality makes you feel inadequate.

What would you do?

**Appendix B: Interview****Table 1.1***Interview Layout*

<b>Basic Information</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>Interview Content</b>	<b>Closing</b>
Time of interview	Introduce	Question 1	Thank the individual for participating.
Date	Discuss the purpose of the study	Question 2	Assure individual confidentiality.
Place	Get an informed consent signature	Question 3	Explain how the interviewee can receive the results of the study
Interviewer	Describe structure of the interview	Question 4	
Interviewee	Ask for questions	Question 5	
Position of interviewee	Define any necessary terminology	Question 6	
Recording information			

**Table 1.2***Interview Questions*

<b>Question Number</b>	<b>Question Asked</b>	<b>Answer Type</b>	<b>Probes</b>
1	What is your personal view on holistic healing/what is it?	Open-ended	Tell me more. Please explain.
2	Do you believe holistic healing is important? Do you believe your physicians place importance on it? If not, why not?	Open-ended	Tell me more. Please explain
3	How have you seen or experienced holistic care within the medical field?	Open-ended	Tell me more. Please explain.
4	Do you believe the physicians' approach to healing (specifically holistic) affects their patients? Do you have any examples or explanations?	Open-ended	Tell me more. Please explain.
5	If holistic healing were truly prioritized, how do you believe medicine would change?	Open-ended	Tell me more. Please explain.
6	If holistic healing is so important, then why do you believe it is not capitalized more within medicine? Where do you believe the problem lies?	Open-ended	Tell me more. Please explain.