

Recently, Cigna began running a series of [TV commercials](#) with actors who have played doctors on TV. These “TV doctors” encourage people to get an annual checkup. While these commercials certainly fit with the current narrative that more health care is always better than less health care, should people really be getting more annual check ups? The answer is no.

The [Society of General Internal Medicine](#) has stated, in connection with the [Choosing Wisely Campaign](#), that physicians should not “perform routine general health checks for asymptomatic adults.” This recommendation is echoed by the 70 other medical societies and organizations that have supported the Choosing Wisely Campaign.

The answer to this first question begs a second question: Do Americans agree with the TV doctors or the real doctors. Based on a survey we conducted in June 2016, the TV doctors are clearly winning. Of the 1,070 people surveyed, 865 (81%) agreed with the statement that an annual physical exam is important to maintaining health.

While the TV doctors are probably (and unsurprisingly) better at appearing on TV and swaying American opinion, the evidence is not on their side. Dr. Ateev Mehrotra of Harvard Medical school [points out](#) that the lost wages from people taking time to get an annual checkup adds up to more than \$2 billion. And that is before the costs of all those checkups are considered.

Beyond our willingness to believe pretty people in lab coats on TV, Americans’ misunderstanding of what contributes to their overall health may explain why they still get annual physicals. As Dr. Steven Schroeder [explains](#), only about 10% of our health is due to remedial health care, i.e., the care doctors provide. In contrast, about 40% of our health is due to our own behavior, such as our smoking habits and relationships with obesity. Despite the small role health care actually plays in our health, 660 (62%) of the 1,070 people we surveyed estimated that 40% of our health is due to remedial health care.

Moving towards more intelligent and more efficient consumption in health care will not be easy, but understanding our own misunderstandings is an important first step.