

## Health care choices confusing, survey finds

By M. ALEXANDER OTTO, The Tacoma News Tribune

A new survey of almost 3,000 Puget Sound-area residents, including 17 percent from Pierce County, found more than half say they're just about clueless when it comes to finding the best doctors, clinics and treatments, the Puget Sound Health Alliance said Thursday.

Almost all of them said they want the group, a coalition of area employers, municipalities and health care organizations, to work up comparison data to help them shop, something the alliance said it will do by next year.

Those surveyed also said they trust their doctors most and the media least when it comes to sound medical advice.

They indicated they are weary of the influence drug companies have over medical practice, but many said they trust information from disease-related associations and Web sites, though some sites are funded, at least in part, by drug company marketing dollars.

Those surveyed also would like to see medical and health insurance bills lowered as well as an overall improvement in local medical care, according to the alliance, founded in 2004 and chaired by King County Executive Ron Sims.

The group surveyed 2,879 area residents in five counties – 17 percent from Pierce, 61 percent from King, 3 percent from Thurston and the rest from Snohomish and Kitsap counties – with the bulk of them between 45 and 74. Most were employees or members of the alliance's 100 organizations.

The results dovetail with the alliance's goal of lowering health care costs for its member organizations, many of whom provide insurance coverage for their employees.

Part of the plan is to reduce complications by encouraging medical practitioners to follow treatment guidelines, something not always done, and empowering consumers to make sound and cost effective choices, a spokeswoman said.

### Health care help

- The Puget Sound Health Alliance Web site is [www.pugetsoundhealthalliance.org](http://www.pugetsoundhealthalliance.org)
- Ratings on how well health care institutions, including Pierce County hospitals, follow expert medical guidelines is available at [www.healthgrades.com](http://www.healthgrades.com)