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NATIONAL PHYSICIAN SURVEY

Beyond Burnout: Trust, Loyalty and the Physician Gender Gap

Advancing change requires transparency and meaningful engagement

Digging to the next layer of physician engagement

Stabilizing and strengthening the healthcare workforce has been a priority of provider organizations for decades. The growing physician shortage and increasing burnout are well documented.

At the same time, provider organizations today are faced with myriad challenges that require hard choices and significant change.

Change takes trust. When leaders take meaningful action they earn trust. Which allows for more action.

A virtuous cycle.

Leaders must take the first step. It starts with knowing where physicians stand today.

So, we asked physicians:

Do you trust your leaders?

Specifically, we surveyed:

» Do physicians trust that their leadership teams are making good decisions for patients and the organization?

» Who do physicians trust most within their organization?

» How much loyalty do physicians feel towards their team and their organization?

» How can leadership teams build trust with their physicians?

» What would make physicians' jobs even better?

Key findings

Physicians' trust in their organization's executive leadership teams is weak. It's even weaker among female physicians and among physicians working in not-for-profit organizations. To gain trust and ultimately, buy-in and engagement for critical initiatives, leaders must be more transparent.

The Trust Gap

» Barely half of physicians trust that their organization's leaders are honest, transparent and making good decisions for patients and the organization.

» Physicians trust their peers the most. CEOs, CMOs, department heads and other leaders lag far behind.

» Physicians at not-for-profit providers are markedly more skeptical than those at investor-owned organizations.

The Engagement Imperative

» One third of physicians express weak loyalty to their organization.

» More than one in five physicians perceive inadequate support from leadership.

» Physicians overwhelmingly want more transparency from administration.

» Physicians' peer relationships are as valuable as operational considerations like having better access to supplies and data.

The Gender Gap

» Female physicians are more skeptical of their leadership teams.

» Barely half of female physicians feel supported by their organization's leadership.

» Female physicians put more value in peer-to-peer relationships, including with nurses.

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Demographics – Balanced Sample (N = 333)

Gender	
Male	59%
Female	41%

Environment	
Urban	42%
Suburban	43%
Rural	15%

Years in Practice	
< 2	16%
2-5	20%
6-10	20%
11-15	15%
16-20	7%
> 20	21%

Area of Practice	
Primary Care	35%
Specialty Care	35%
Hospital-Based	24%
Multi-Site	6%

Role/Seniority	
Intern	3%
Resident	13%
Fellow	4%
Attending/Faculty	16%
Practicing Physician	46%
Chief/Chair	3%
Administrator	11%
Other	4%

Employment Situation*	
TOTAL not-for-profit	**39%**
Employed by a not-for-profit hospital or health system	29%
In a practice affiliated with a not-for-profit hospital or health system	5%
Academic medical center/system	5%
TOTAL investor-owned	**37%**
Employed by a for-profit hospital or health system	26%
In a practice affiliated with a for-profit hospital or health system	6%
Employed by an investor-owned practice/company	5%
Partner in an investor-owned practice/company	< 1%
Private/independent practice	23%
Other	< 2%

*Throughout this report, unless otherwise noted:
- "**Not-for-profit organization**" includes both employed by and affiliated with a not-for-profit hospital or system and academic medical center/system.
- "**Investor-owned organization**" includes both employed by and affiliated with a for-profit or investor-owned hospital or system, as well as partner in or employed by an investor-owned practice/company.

The Leadership Trust Gap

Too few physicians view their organization's executive leadership teams as trustworthy decision-makers
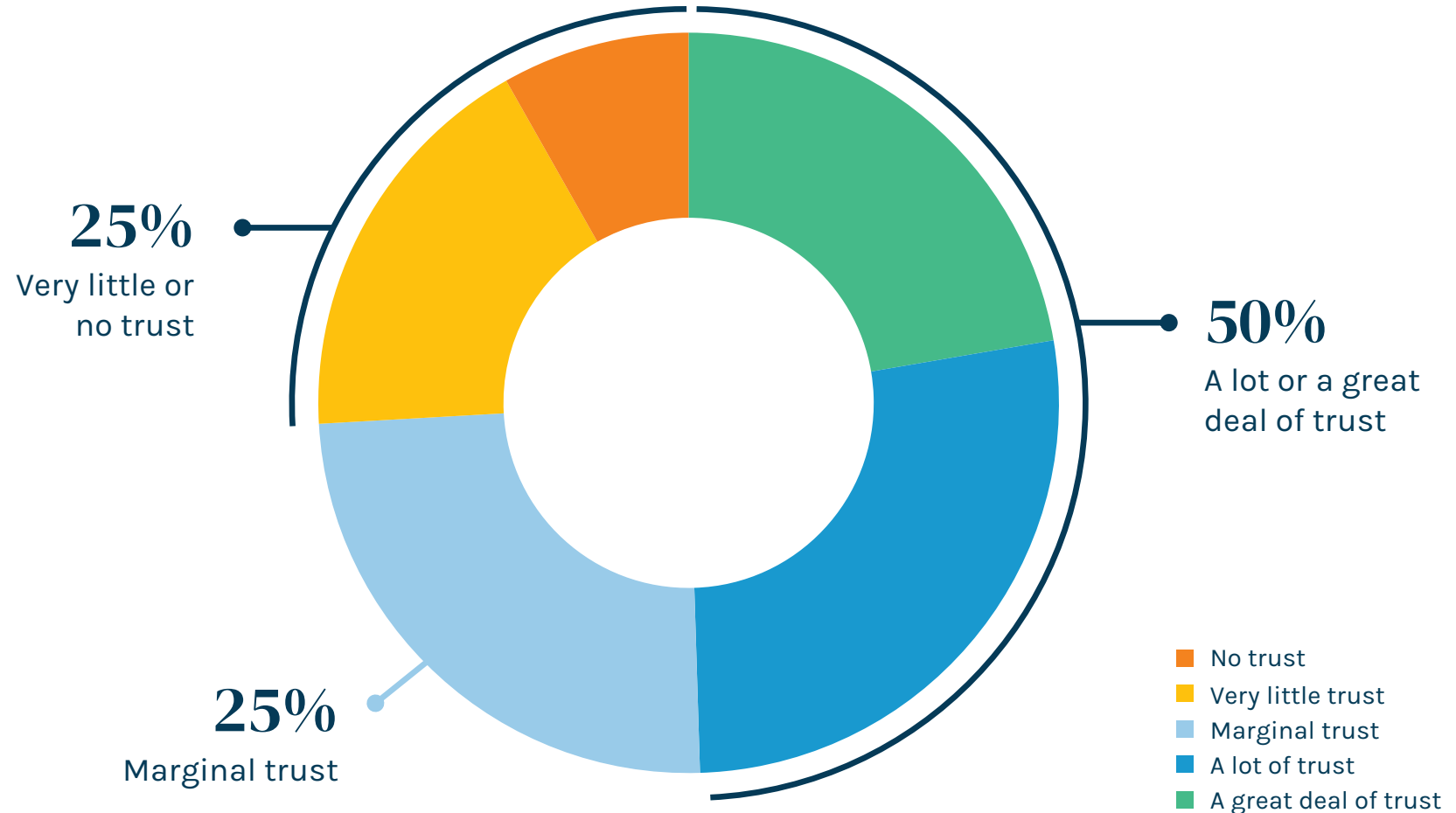
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Lack of trust in leadership is a significant issue

How much do you trust that:

"The leaders of my organization are honest and transparent?"

OF NOTE

» **Gender gap:** Only 42% of female physicians have confidence that their leadership team is honest and transparent, compared to 55% of male physicians.

» **Organization gap:** Just 36% of physicians we surveyed at not-for-profit systems have that confidence, compared to 51% of physicians at investor-owned providers.

25%
Very little or no trust

50%
A lot or a great deal of trust

25%
Marginal trust

Legend:
- No trust
- Very little trust
- Marginal trust
- A lot of trust
- A great deal of trust

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Barely half of physicians trust the **patient-related** decisions of their leaders

How much do you trust that:

"The leaders of my organization are making decisions that are good for patients."
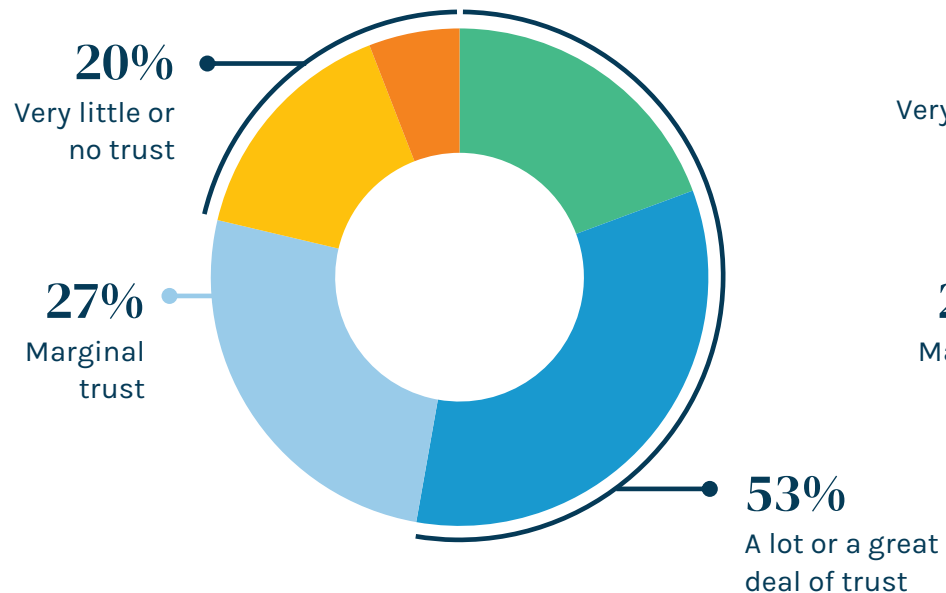

23%
Very little or no trust

53%
A lot or a great deal of trust

24%
Marginal trust

Legend:
- No trust
- Very little trust
- Marginal trust
- A lot of trust
- A great deal of trust

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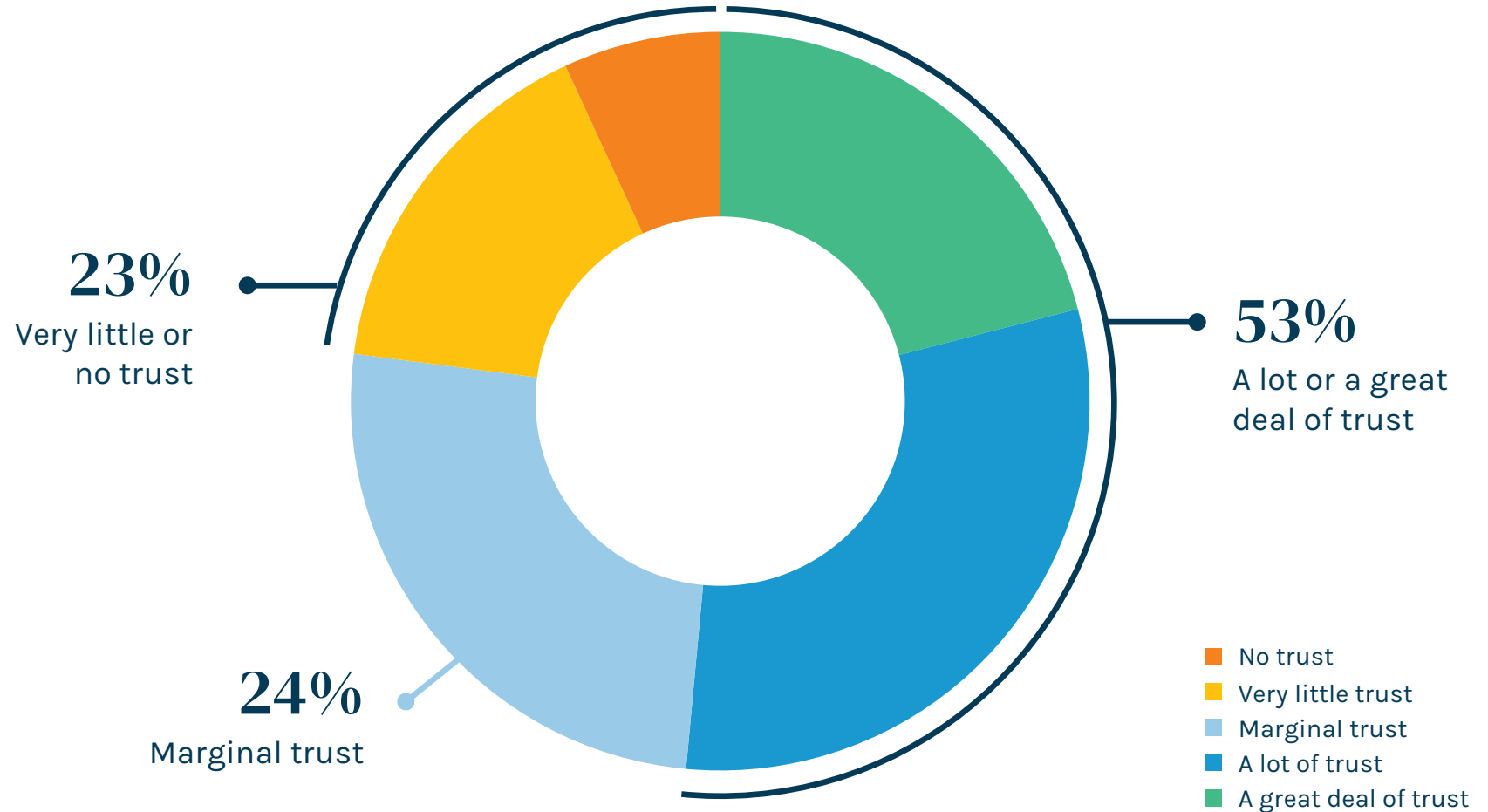
Barely half of physicians trust the **business-related** decisions of their leaders

How much do you trust that:

"The leaders of my organization are making good <u>financial</u> decisions."

20%
Very little or no trust

27%
Marginal trust

53%
A lot or a great deal of trust

"The leaders of my organization are making good <u>operational</u> decisions."

22%
Very little or no trust

28%
Marginal trust

50%
A lot or a great deal of trust
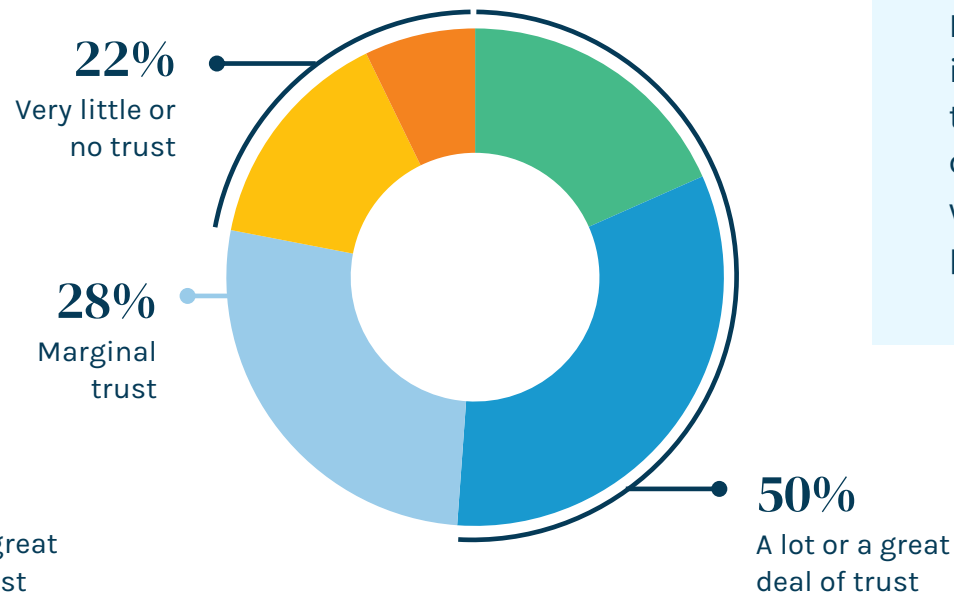
OF NOTE

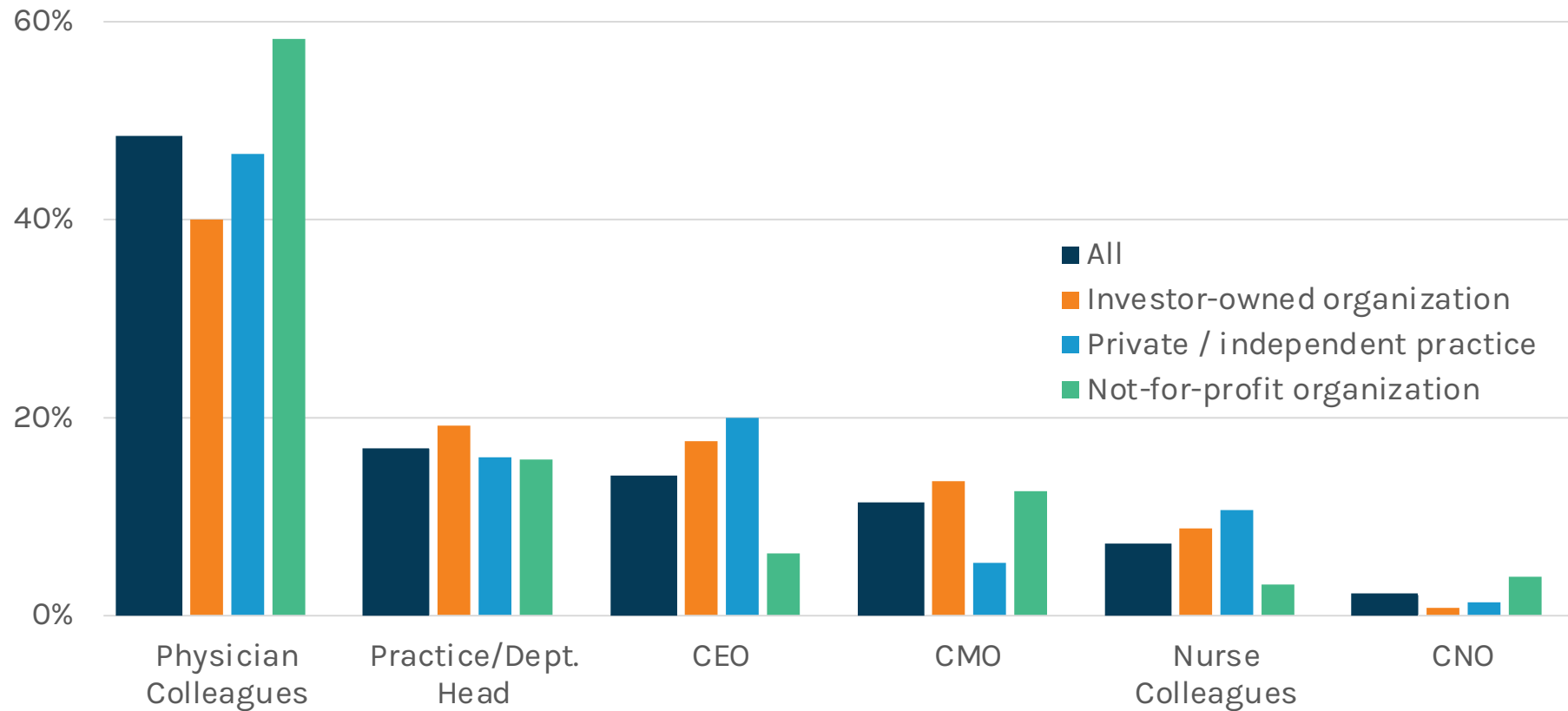If nowhere else, finances and operations should be the place where leaders are trusted. Physicians want to know that even if their administration is out of touch with the medical side, they can keep the organization running well and leave caregivers to care for patients. This is not the case today.

Legend:
- No trust
- Very little trust
- Marginal trust
- A lot of trust
- A great deal of trust

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Physicians trust their peers the most – by a wide margin

Who do you trust most in your organization?

Legend:
- **All** (dark navy)
- **Investor-owned organization** (orange)
- **Private / independent practice** (blue)
- **Not-for-profit organization** (green)

X-axis categories: Physician Colleagues, Practice/Dept. Head, CEO, CMO, Nurse Colleagues, CNO

Y-axis: 0% to 60%

OF NOTE

Our 2022 nurse survey found similar results: Nurses name their direct manager and nursing colleagues as the most trusted voices. Department heads come in third, while executive leaders are last.

N: All = 333; NFP = 127; FP = 125; Private = 75

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The Engagement Gap

Physicians overwhelmingly view greater transparency from leadership teams as imperative for closing the trust gap

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Transparency and engagement are the currency of trust

What is the number one thing that could help increase your trust in the leaders of your organization?

"If they seemed more engaged and authentic when pursuing interactions and evaluating the needs of our front-line providers."

"More transparency about the budgets and clinical goals"

"If I felt that they cared about us more than in a financial sense"

"More transparency about financial matters"

"Stop being so money hungry"

"Offering more transparent access to decisions at hand."

"More receptive to ideas and input from physicians."

"Ability to connect with them"   "Honest communication"   "Transparency, fairness, honesty"

"We would have more trust if we felt like the hospital system was more human…It seems like everyone is just a tool in a giant tool box…"
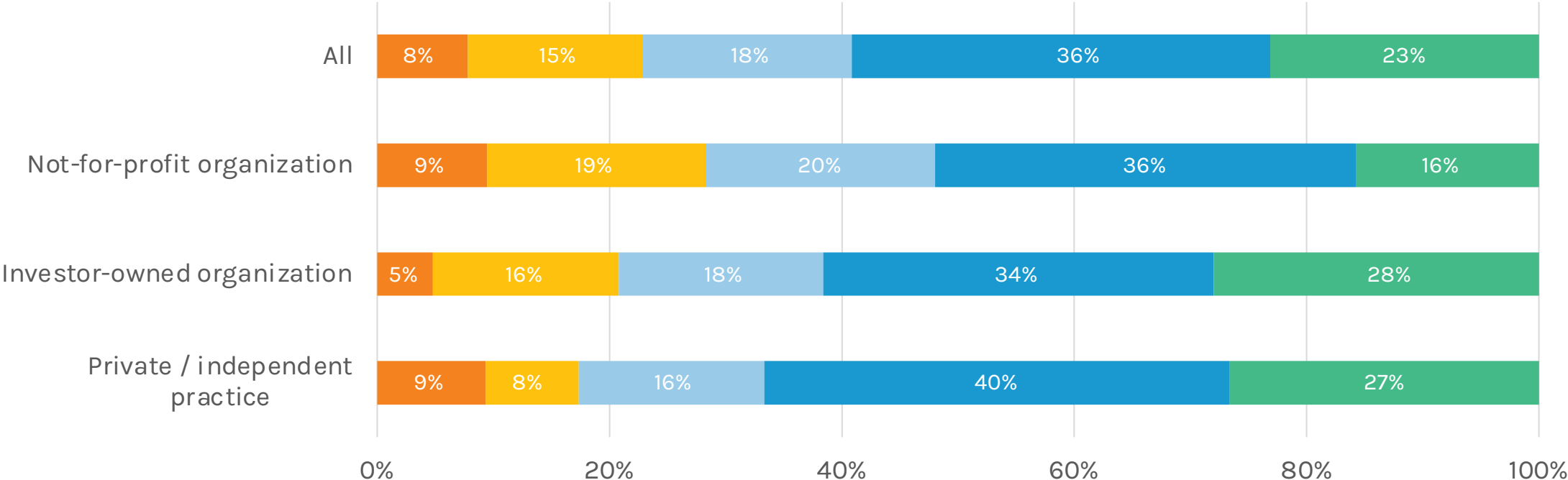
OF NOTE

Fully one third of open text responses included the words "transparent," "transparency," "honest" or "honesty" as important elements of building trust among physicians.

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More than one in five perceive inadequate support from leadership

How much do you agree with the statement:
*"The leaders of my organization are doing a good job supporting **me and my peers**"?*

■ Strongly disagree   ■ Somewhat disagree   ■ Neither agree nor disagree   ■ Somewhat agree   ■ Strongly agree

Category	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
All	8%	15%	18%	36%	23%
Not-for-profit organization	9%	19%	20%	36%	16%
Investor-owned organization	5%	16%	18%	34%	28%
Private / independent practice	9%	8%	16%	40%	27%

N: All = 333; NFP = 127; FP = 125; Private = 75

More than one in five think leadership doesn't support clinical staff

How much do you agree with the statement:
"The leaders of my organization are doing a good job supporting **other caregivers like nurses, APPs and techs**"?

■ Strongly disagree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Strongly agree

Category	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
All	8%	16%	20%	35%	21%
Not-for-profit organization	13%	20%	20%	29%	17%
Investor-owned organization	7%	12%	21%	39%	21%
Private / independent practice	4%	15%	17%	37%	27%

N: All = 333; NFP = 127; FP = 125; Private = 75
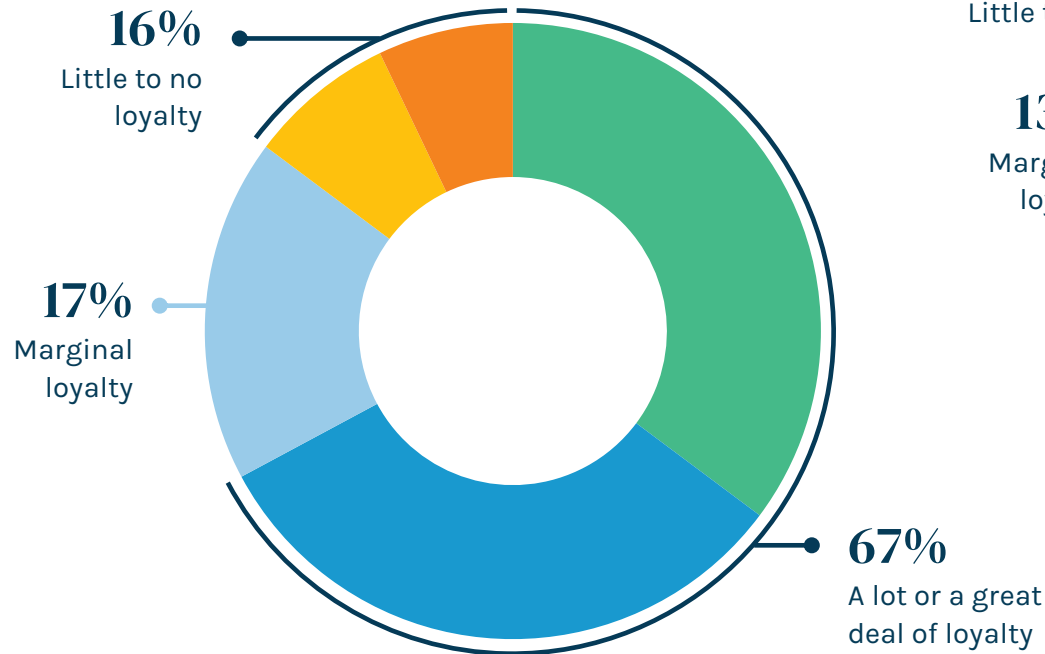
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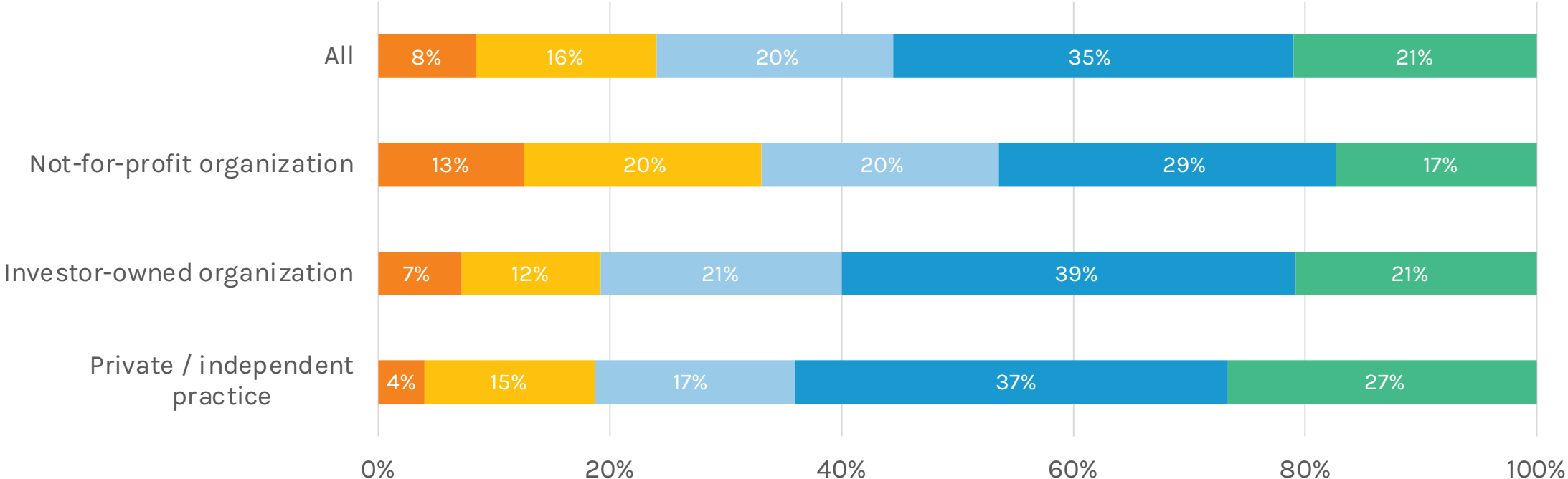
One third of physicians express weak loyalty to their organization

On a scale of 1-5, how much loyalty do you feel towards...

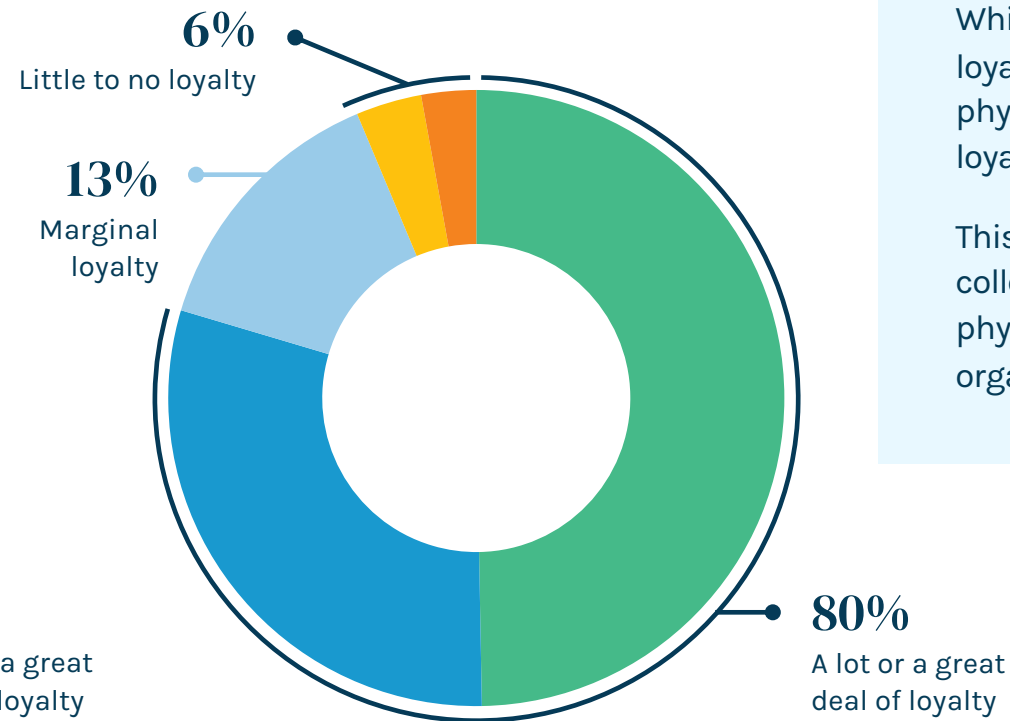### The hospital(s) or facility/facilities where I work

N = 320

16%
Little to no loyalty

17%
Marginal loyalty

67%
A lot or a great deal of loyalty

My practice or department

N = 330

6%
Little to no loyalty

13%
Marginal loyalty

80%
A lot or a great deal of loyalty

OF NOTE

While not feeling as much loyalty to their **organizations**, physicians reported strong loyalty to their **teams**.

This tighter connection to colleagues applies to physicians across all types of organizations.

Legend:
- No loyalty
- Very little loyalty
- Marginal loyalty
- A lot of loyalty
- A great deal of loyalty
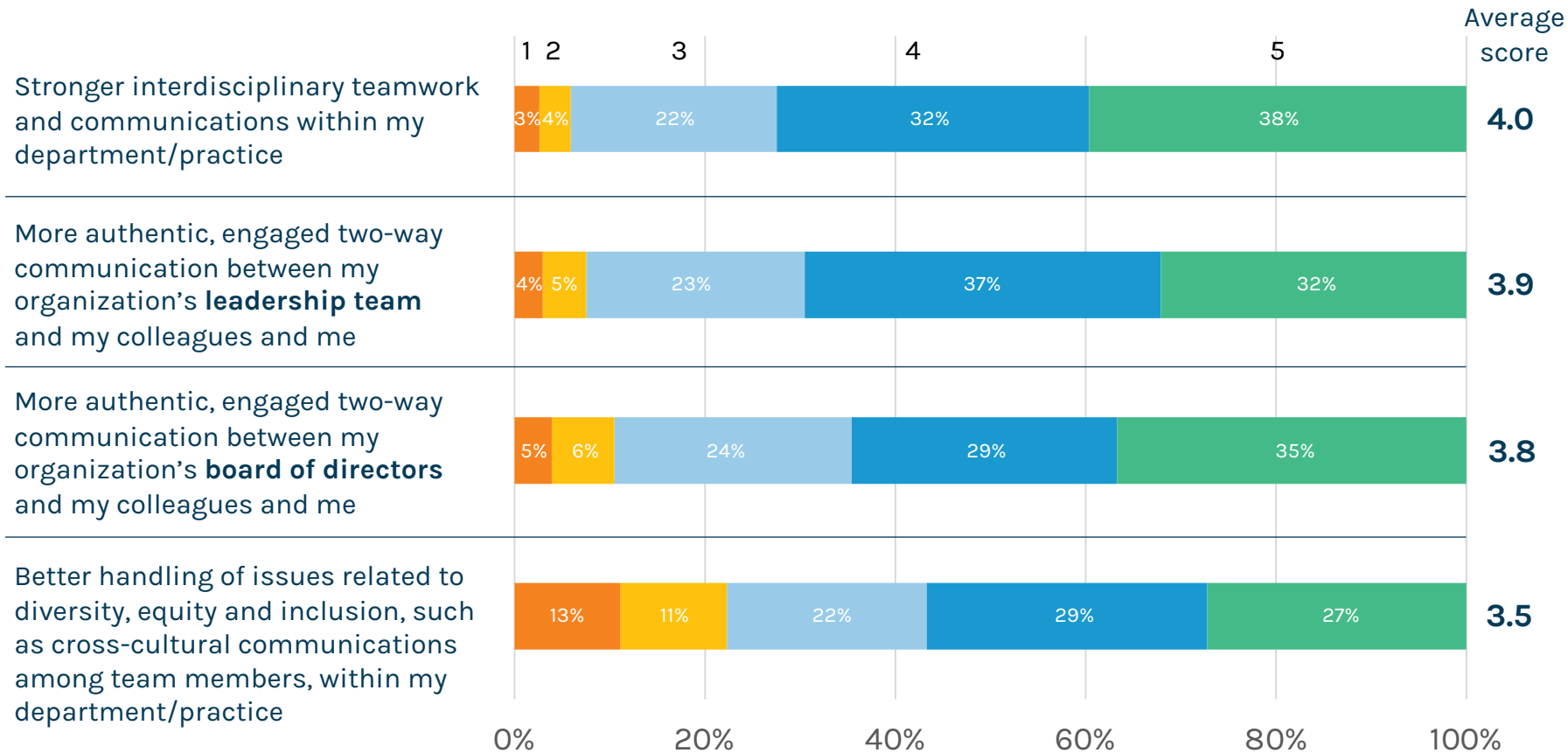
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Physicians consider relationships and **who** they work with to be just as important as **how** they work

*On a scale of 1-5, when it comes to improving your work environment and job satisfaction, how much of a positive impact would each of the following **operational actions** have?*

Average score

	1	2	3	4	5	Average score
Making it easier to obtain the supplies and medications I need to help my patients	5%	5%	18%	31%	41%	**4.0**
Creating an environment where I can build better relationships with colleagues	4%	4%	23%	33%	36%	**3.9**
Giving me better access to good data about my patients (for example, prescription fill rates and follow-up appointments)	6%	5%	18%	35%	36%	**3.9**
Making it easier to refer and transfer patients to other departments or specialists	9%	7%	21%	30%	33%	**3.7**
Improving my access to the EHR at the system/facility where I practice	8%	9%	20%	32%	30%	**3.7**
Allowing me to have more influence on the business decisions that affect my practice	5%	11%	23%	29%	32%	**3.6**
Being more transparent about finances in my organization	8%	10%	24%	29%	29%	**3.6**
Finding ways to help me meet basic needs – getting food, water and using the restroom – while I'm at work	11%	11%	21%	24%	32%	**3.5**

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

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Physicians value positive dynamics with their team and leaders

When it comes to improving your work environment and job satisfaction, how much of a positive impact would each of the following **engagement efforts** have?

Engagement effort	1	2	3	4	5	Average score
Stronger interdisciplinary teamwork and communications within my department/practice	3%	4%	22%	32%	38%	**4.0**
More authentic, engaged two-way communication between my organization's **leadership team** and my colleagues and me	4%	5%	23%	37%	32%	**3.9**
More authentic, engaged two-way communication between my organization's **board of directors** and my colleagues and me	5%	6%	24%	29%	35%	**3.8**
Better handling of issues related to diversity, equity and inclusion, such as cross-cultural communications among team members, within my department/practice	13%	11%	22%	29%	27%	**3.5**

OF NOTE

Physicians said that communication with leadership has as much benefit as providing better access to supplies and data.

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The risks of limited trust

Physicians are on the front line of care and are the face of your organization. Broken trust doesn't just lead to broken relationships, it can also lead to a broken business model. Smart leaders should avoid hands-off complacency – leaving physicians to treat patients while they run the organization. Instead, leaders should amplify authentic engagement and two-way communication. Otherwise, the lack of trust among physicians creates significant risk to…

TURNOVER

Physicians who don't trust their leaders may be primed for poaching if an opportunity they perceive as better comes along.

REVENUE

If physicians don't trust that good decisions are being made, they'll be less likely to engage in growing the organization through patient referrals, retention and acquisition.

PATIENT SATISFACTION

If physicians don't trust or feel pride at the place they work, it will affect how they show up in front of patients and, ultimately, lower patient satisfaction.

NECESSARY CHANGE

Without physician support, any change initiative – whether related to service lines, operational efficiency or quality improvement – has higher potential for failure. Their engagement is essential to driving improvement.

PUBLIC PERCEPTION

Your physicians are trusted voices in the community. Their trust in leaders and the organization's direction is a critical component of ensuring community support and advancing your mission.

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The work ahead

To retain physicians, drive transformative change and build a stronger provider network, clinicians must be part of the process every step of the way.

Organizations need a value proposition for physicians that extends beyond their clinical work and provides meaningful engagement. Especially vital is two-way communication that ensures leadership hears and addresses physician needs.

It all starts with building a foundation of trust.

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More questions to lead to action...

Do you know your physicians?

Beyond pay, what are the reasons physicians stay at your organization? What would push them to leave?

Assess the clinicians and caregivers within your organization to quantify their level of trust in the institution and its leaders. Use this data to identify where gaps in trust, engagement and resources exist.

Then, report back on the findings so physicians know they've been heard.

Is your physician retention strategy a plan or a hope?

Build specific, action-oriented retention and engagement plans for physicians in every role and at every stage of their career, plus the communications materials and channels to deliver those plans.

Pursue achievable interventions – tailored to your physicians' needs and your organization's resources – to improve the work environment and reduce burnout. Keep two-way communication open; make physicians part of the process.

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More questions to lead to action...

Are you talking at your physicians... or engaging with them?

Trust is built through consistency, transparency and decision-making authority. Do you have the right communications vehicles to deliver those messages? Evaluate whether your existing channels are the right ones for your workforce and reach physicians at the right time and place.

Sharpen your leadership team's communication skills by investing in training workshops. Identify, equip and activate physician champions to help accelerate change and improve two-way communication between clinicians and leadership.

Do you (actually) have a culture of transparency?

Throughout this work, elevate your physician communications and engagement.

Underpin your operational and communications initiatives with a commitment to responsible transparency – even when the information may be difficult or unflattering. This includes financial conversations about how resources are being deployed so physicians can see how their work connects to the financial health of the organization and their department.

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Wondering what your physicians really think about your organization?

Anxious to curb persistent burnout and fatigue among your clinical staff?

Seeking to build trust throughout your workforce?

We can help.

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The Gender Gap

Trust is markedly lower among female physicians than their male peers

Demographics – Female Oversample (N = 428)

Gender

Male	46%
Female	54%

Environment

Urban	40%
Suburban	44%
Rural	16%

Years in Practice

< 2	16%
2-5	21%
6-10	20%
11-15	14%
16-20	10%
> 20	18%

Area of Practice

Primary Care	37%
Specialty Care	35%
Hospital-Based	23%
Multi-Site	5%

Role/Seniority

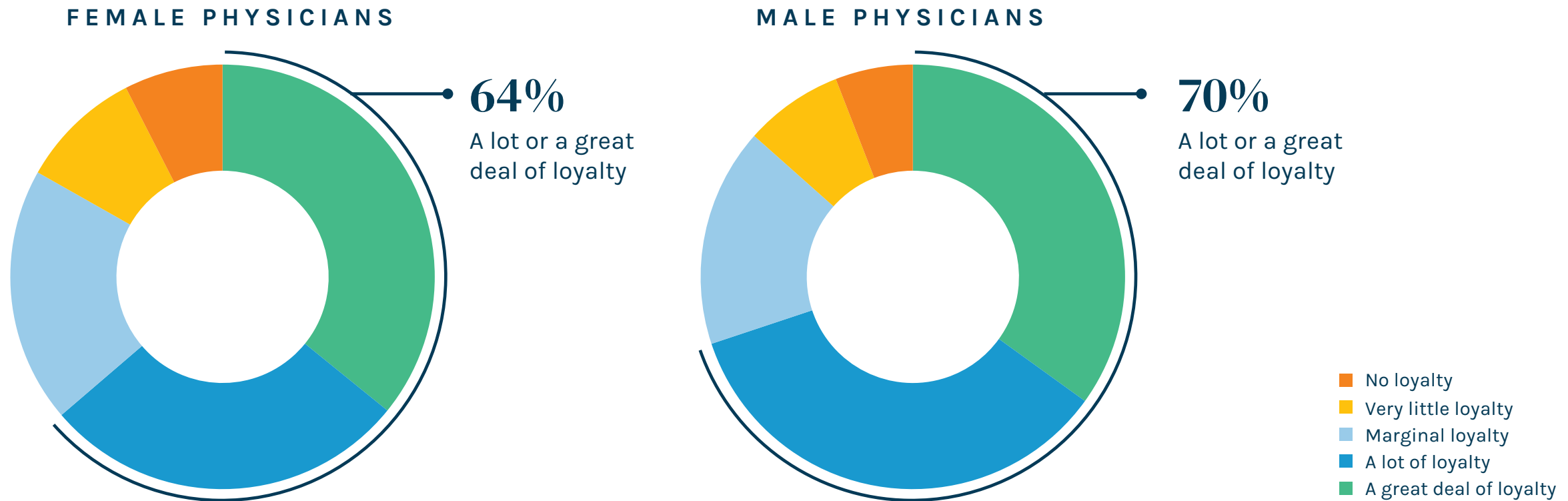|	
Intern	3%
Resident	11%
Fellow	4%
Attending/Faculty	17%
Practicing Physician	46%
Chief/Chair	4%
Administrator	10%
Other	5%

Employment Situation*

TOTAL not-for-profit	**39%**
Employed by a not-for-profit hospital or health system	28%
In a practice affiliated with a not-for-profit hospital or health system	5%
Academic medical center/system	6%
TOTAL investor-owned	**36%**
Employed by a for-profit hospital or health system	24%
In a practice affiliated with a for-profit hospital or health system	7%
Employed by an investor-owned practice/company	4%
Partner in an investor-owned practice/company	1%
Private/independent practice	22%
Other	2%

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- "**For-profit organization**" includes both employed by and affiliated with a for-profit hospital or system, as well as partner in or employed by an investor-owned practice/company.

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Female physicians feel slightly less loyalty to their organization compared to their male peers

How much loyalty do you feel towards "**The hospital(s) or facility/facilities where I work**"?

FEMALE PHYSICIANS

64%
A lot or a great deal of loyalty

MALE PHYSICIANS

70%
A lot or a great deal of loyalty

- No loyalty
- Very little loyalty
- Marginal loyalty
- A lot of loyalty
- A great deal of loyalty

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The gap is slightly wider when it comes to loyalty to teams

How much loyalty do you feel towards "**My practice or department**"?
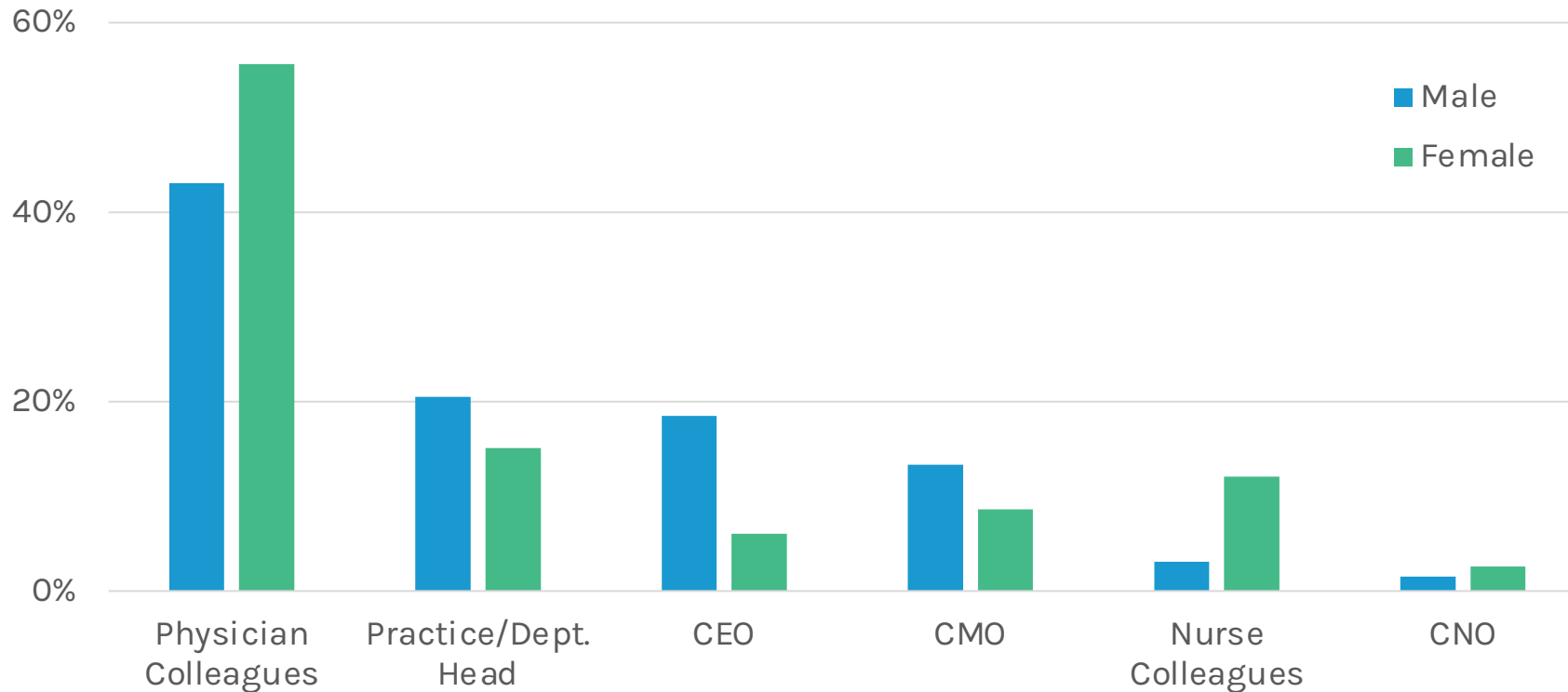
FEMALE PHYSICIANS
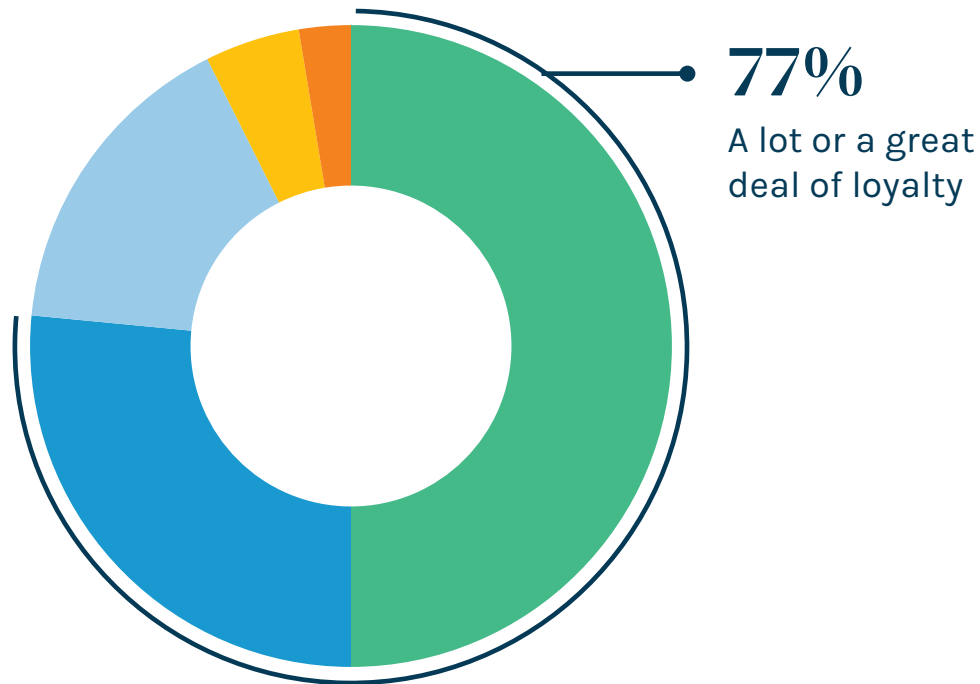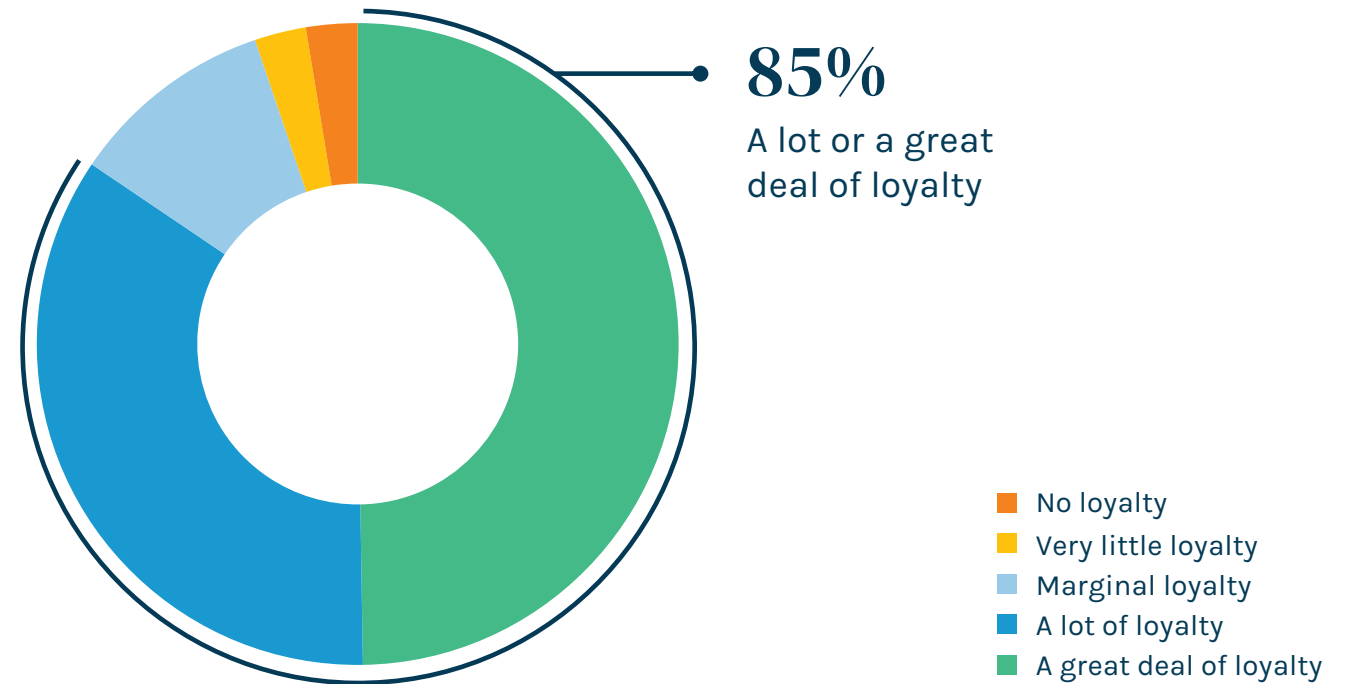
77%
A lot or a great deal of loyalty

MALE PHYSICIANS

85%
A lot or a great deal of loyalty

- No loyalty
- Very little loyalty
- Marginal loyalty
- A lot of loyalty
- A great deal of loyalty

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Female physicians are less likely to trust executive leaders

Who do you trust most in your organization?

Legend:
- Male (blue)
- Female (green)

Categories (x-axis): Physician Colleagues, Practice/Dept. Head, CEO, CMO, Nurse Colleagues, CNO
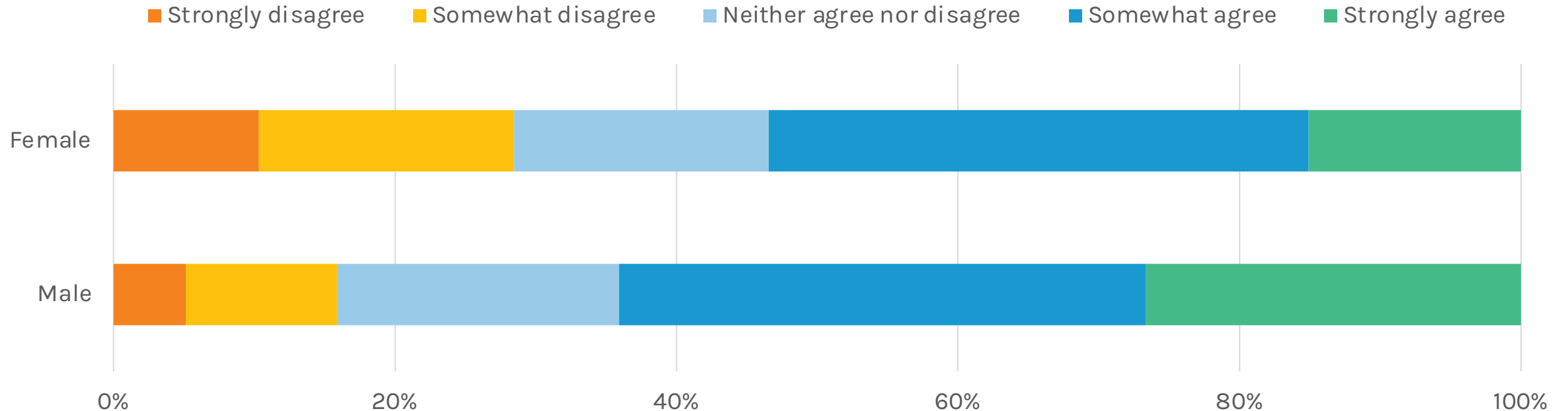
Y-axis: 0% to 60%

OF NOTE

Relationships matter: When looking at any segment of the physician population, peers are considered the most trusted voice by a wide margin.

However, female physicians are four times more likely than male physicians to consider nurses the most trusted voice.

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Barely half of female physicians agree that leadership supports them

How much do you agree with the statement, "The leaders of my organization are doing a good job supporting **me and my peers**"?

Legend: ■ Strongly disagree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Strongly agree

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Only half of female physicians agree that leadership supports clinical staff, compared to more than 60% of male physicians

How much do you agree with the statement, "The leaders of my organization are doing a good job supporting **other caregivers like nurses, APPs and techs**"?

Legend: ■ Strongly disagree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Strongly agree

Categories: Female, Male

X-axis: 0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

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