

Employer-initiated investigation of physician stressors to inform well-being offerings

State T¹, Edwards ZC¹, Beveridge R¹, Schulz S¹, Blakemore D²

- 1. Humana Inc., Louisville, KY;
- 2. Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Nashville, TN

Background

A published survey of physicians nationwide reported that nearly half of physicians have experienced burnout, and physicians are more likely to be dissatisfied with their work-life balance than other U.S. workers.¹ While efforts to reduce stress can seem overwhelming to already busy physicians, large employers of physicians, such as hospital systems and health plans, are in a unique position to offer holistic programs to help physicians improve their well-being. This exploratory survey assessed the need for such programs.

Objective

To assess prevalence and causes of stress in a large group of employed physicians in an effort to inform development of physician well-being programs.

Methods

- **Study Design:** Cross-sectional survey
- **Data Source:**
 - A questionnaire developed using Survey Monkey was sent via email in August 2014 to physicians working in direct patient care, client facing, and administrative roles for Humana Inc., a healthcare company providing insurance for 13.8 million individuals in all 50 states (2014).²
- **Inclusion Criteria:**
 - All full-time employed physicians employed by Humana Inc. were eligible to participate in the survey.
 - The questionnaire was emailed to all Humana physicians, which included practicing clinicians, client facing, and those with administrative roles.
- **Survey:**
 - Source and level of stress were measured using multiple choice questions.
 - Example questions:
 1. How often do you feel high levels of stress: rarely, occasionally, frequently, daily?
 2. In what areas of life do you feel stressed: work, home, both?
 - Likert-type scales were used to identify challenges and associated levels of stress.
 - Example questions:
 1. Are there specific areas which are particularly challenging (e.g., money, the economy, my career, family responsibility, relationships, personal health concerns)?
 2. What factors contribute to your stress at work (e.g., technology, resources, support staff, work flow, patient scheduling, clarity of role)?
 3. What factors contribute to your stress at home (e.g., financial pressures, work-life balance, not enough time in the day, aging parents, relationship issues, sleep)?
 - Respondents were asked to assign a stress level to each challenge: no stress, low stress, moderate stress, high stress, N/A.
- **Statistical Analyses:**
 - Likert-type scale items were analyzed using descriptive statistics
 - Free text responses were analyzed using text mining and R to analyze word frequency

Results

Figure 1. Study Population and Frequency of Regular Stress

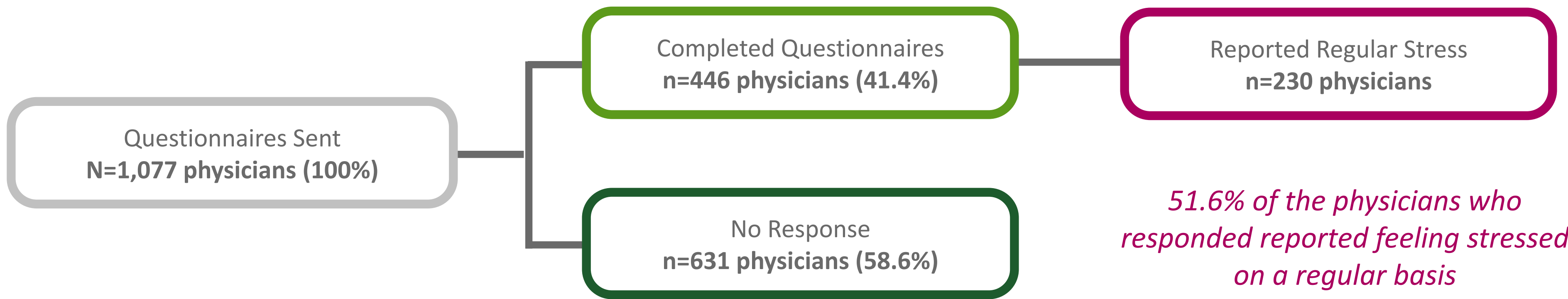


Figure 2. Source of Stress by Stress Level

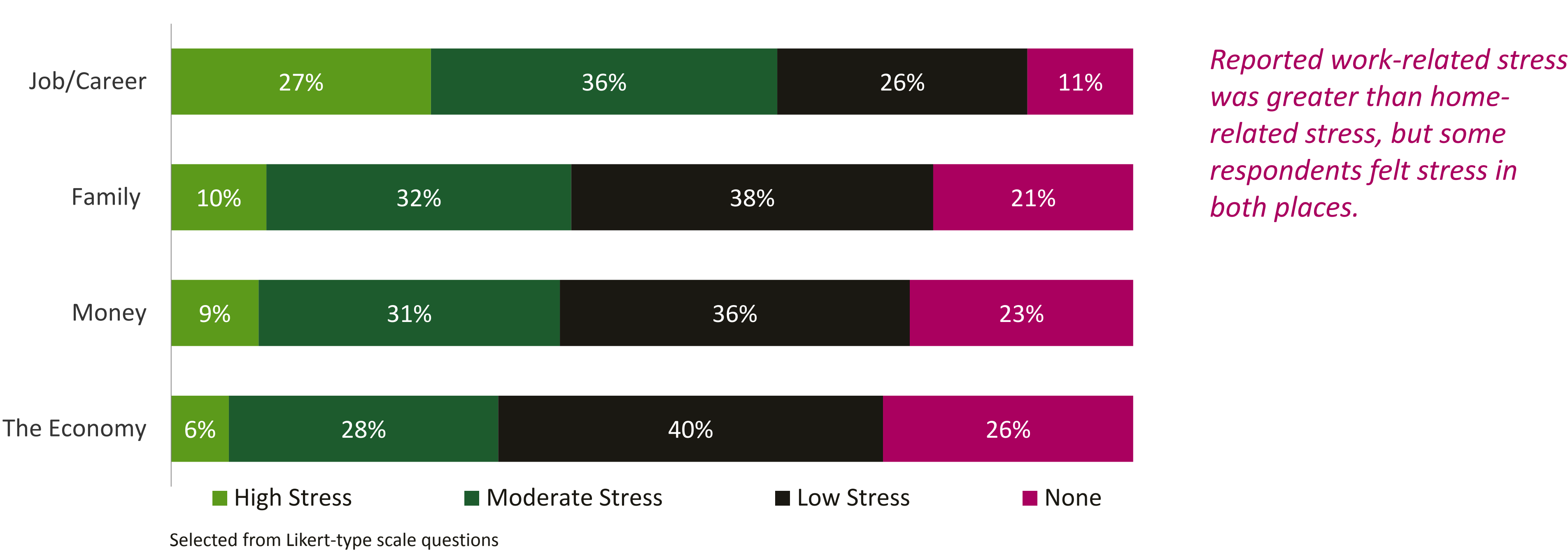


Figure 3. Most Common Work-Related Stressors

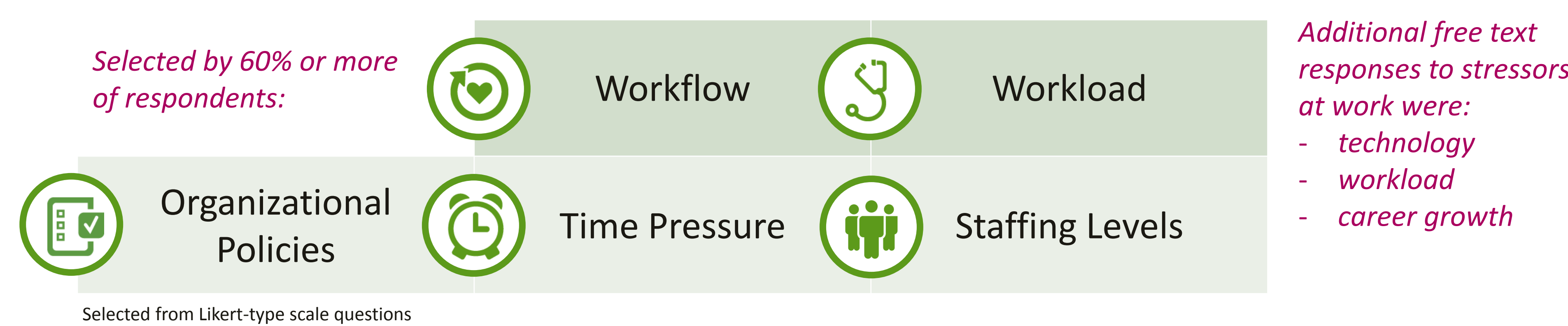
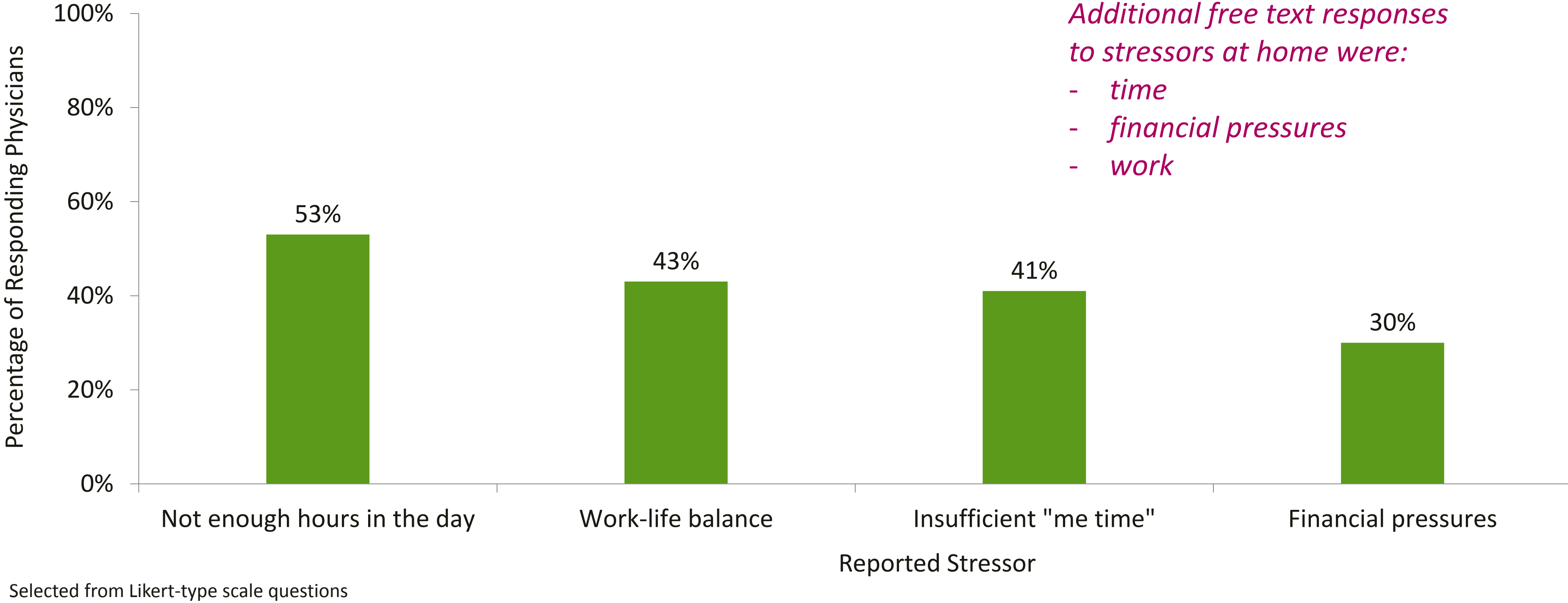


Figure 4. Most Common Home-Related Stressors



Conclusions

- More than half of surveyed physicians reported frequent stress, with work contributing more stress than home life factors.
- Workflow, workload, technology and career growth were among the most reported work-related stressors.
- Time, work-life balance and financial strain contribute greatly to home-related stress for physicians.

Opportunities

- Humana Inc. is piloting resources aimed at reducing stress and stressors: work-life concierge, brain health resources, physical activity tailored to work settings (clinical, at-your-desk, work-at-home and travel) and executive financial services.
- Robust talent and operation assessments are being conducted to inform specific action plans in order to address the common contributing factors to stress in the workplace like workload and technology.

Limitations

- Limitations common to self reported survey data apply to this study. Examples include, but are not limited to:
 - Response bias, a wide range of cognitive biases that influence participant responses
 - Acquiescence bias, the tendency to agree with all survey questions
 - Extreme responding, the tendency to select responses on the high and low ends of the scale
 - Social desirability bias, the tendency to answer questions in a manner that would be viewed favorably by others
- This study utilized data from a physician population contracted by a single health insurance provider, and may not be generalizable to other physician populations.
- The cross-sectional design of this study prevents inference of temporal or causal relationship between the variables.

References

1. Shanafelt T, Boone S, Tan L et al. Arch Intern Med. 2012;172(18):1377-1385.
2. Humana Press Release, 2014 Annual Report. Available at: <http://phx.corporate-ir.net/phoenix.zhtml?c=92913&p=irol-irhome>. Accessed September 1, 2015.