Reducing Delay to Diagnosis - Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS FT

BACKGROUND

Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust serves a population of +/- 507,000 people. Bedford Hospital and Luton & Dunstable Hospital have approximately 140 and 145 axial SpA patients known to their rheumatology services respectively. Based on a national prevalence ratio of 1:200 , the trust should have approx. 2,470 patients. Therefore the combined total of 285 demonstrates a shortfall of 2,180 patients.

An audit in 2019 revealed the average time to diagnosis of patients in Luton was 7.1 years. Therefore, with this significant delay alongside a missing cohort of patients, we were keen to join the NASS Aspiring to Excellence programme. Through raising awareness, educating and building relationships with our primary care services, we want to create meaningful change for this cohort of patients. In doing so this will help reduce our diagnostic delay, with the goal of achieving the GIRFT and NASS target of one year to diagnosis.

OBJECTIVES

The overall aim of our project is to raise awareness of axial SpA amongst our primary care colleagues through targeted educational sessions. This will ensure clinicians are aware of the appropriate investigations and NICE referral criteria to rheumatology. Through this educational process it will provide opportunities to develop improvement initiatives with other local service providers and improve general clinical practice in identifying, referring and managing axial SpA patients.
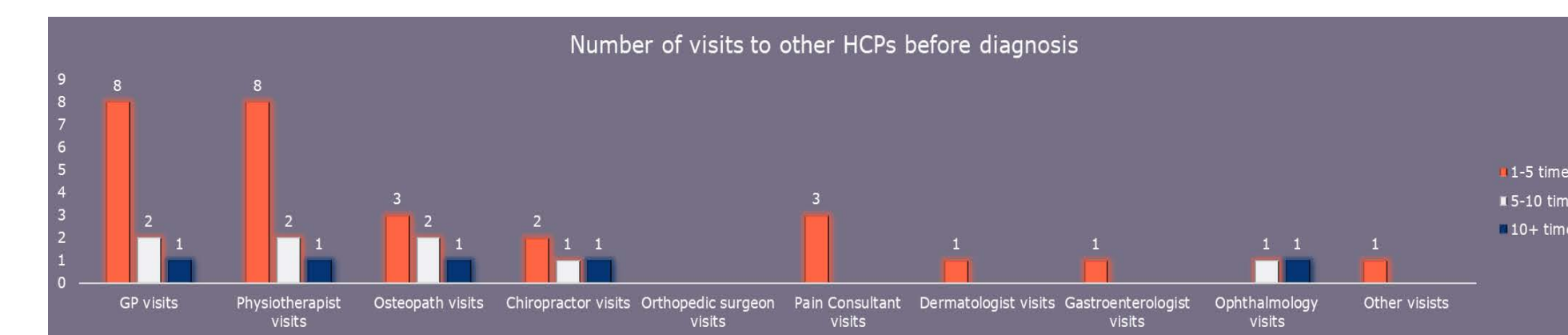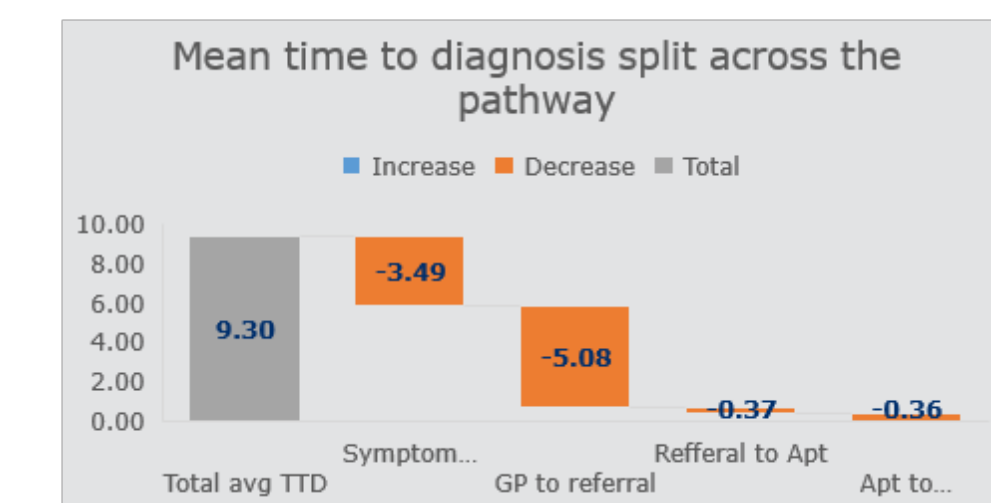
METHOD

A baseline service review utilising the NASS Audit Tool 2023 is being undertaken to establish our current patient diagnostic delay timescales. We are targeting patients already in our service and collecting data retrospectively of those who have been diagnosed within the last 5 years.

Education sessions are being provided for the first contact clinicians in Bedfordshire (Fig 1), who encounter patients with low back pain and/or suspected axial SpA in order to improve time to diagnosis. The immediate impact of the completed sessions is assessed using a pre and post session questionnaire.

The overall impact will be measured through repeating the audit by targeting newly diagnosed patients in the future. This will assess whether the delay timescales have improved through our raising of awareness and education in the primary care community.

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RESULTS

Data collection using the NASS Audit Tool 2023 has suggested that our current delay across Bedfordshire is 9.3 years with the most significant proportion of delay occurring in primary care.

Following the education sessions confidence in recognising inflammatory back pain improved by 61% (mean) in the GP trainee group and 25% (mean) in the MSK provider group (Graphs 1 & 2).

Fig.1

„Thank you for a great informative presentation and discussion ... Lets keep pushing for ongoing collaboration."

1 Community MSK Provider

2 GP Trainees

CONCLUSION

This has been an exciting yet challenging project. Data collection has been very difficult as there were no existing collection methods in place. It has not yet been possible to gather information regarding numbers of suspected axial SpA referrals from outside sources into the rheumatology service.

We are proud to have contributed to the NASS National Audit. Also that we have identified current patients diagnosed within the last five years, with this data soon to be available.

The early outcomes of our first year of this project show through early data collection, where our delays are in the patient diagnostic journey.

The positive responses and improved confidence achieved through our education sessions show an increased awareness and discussion about axial SpA within primary care. Leading to many opportunities for future workforce collaboration across interface, primary and secondary care.
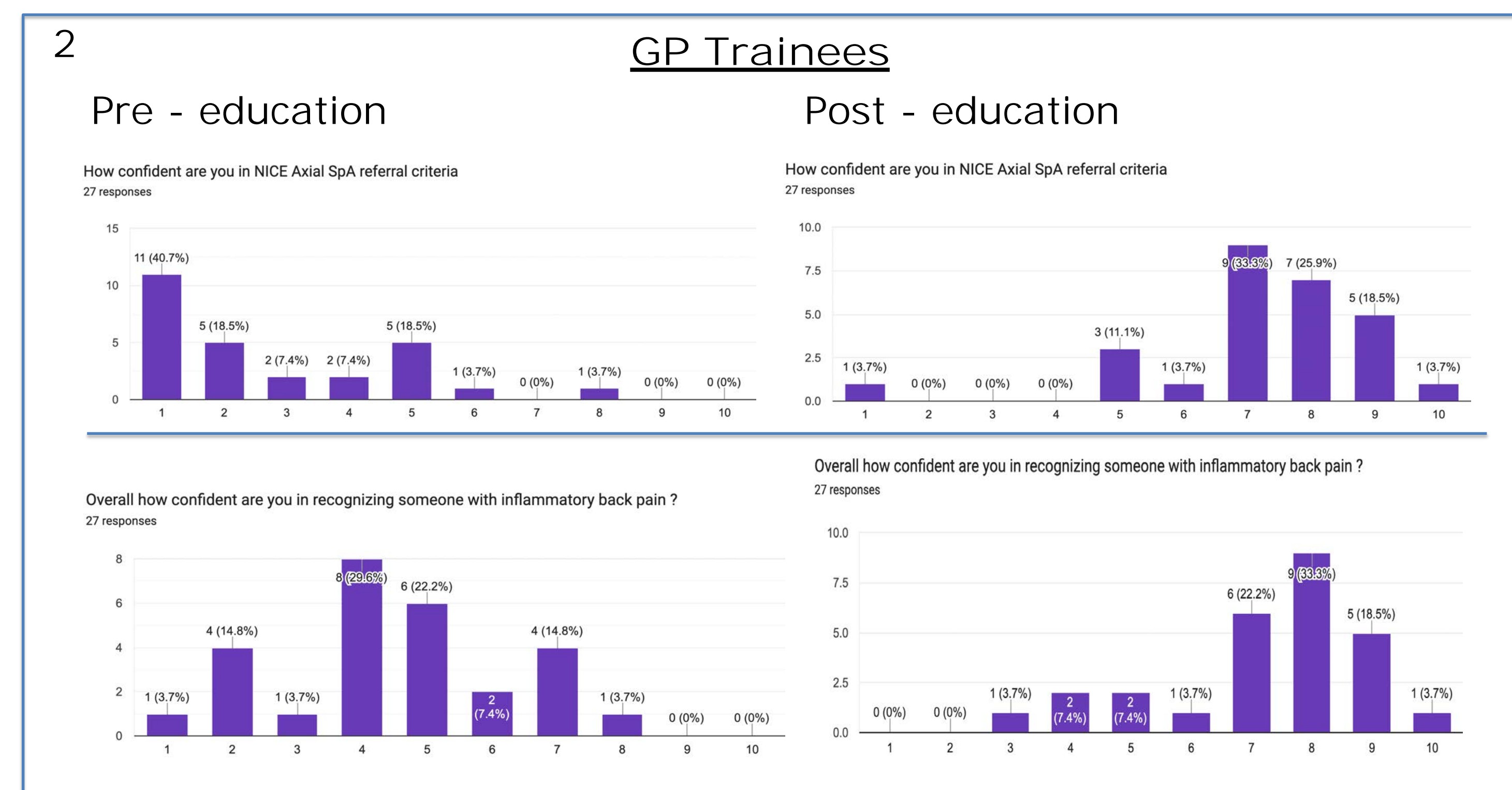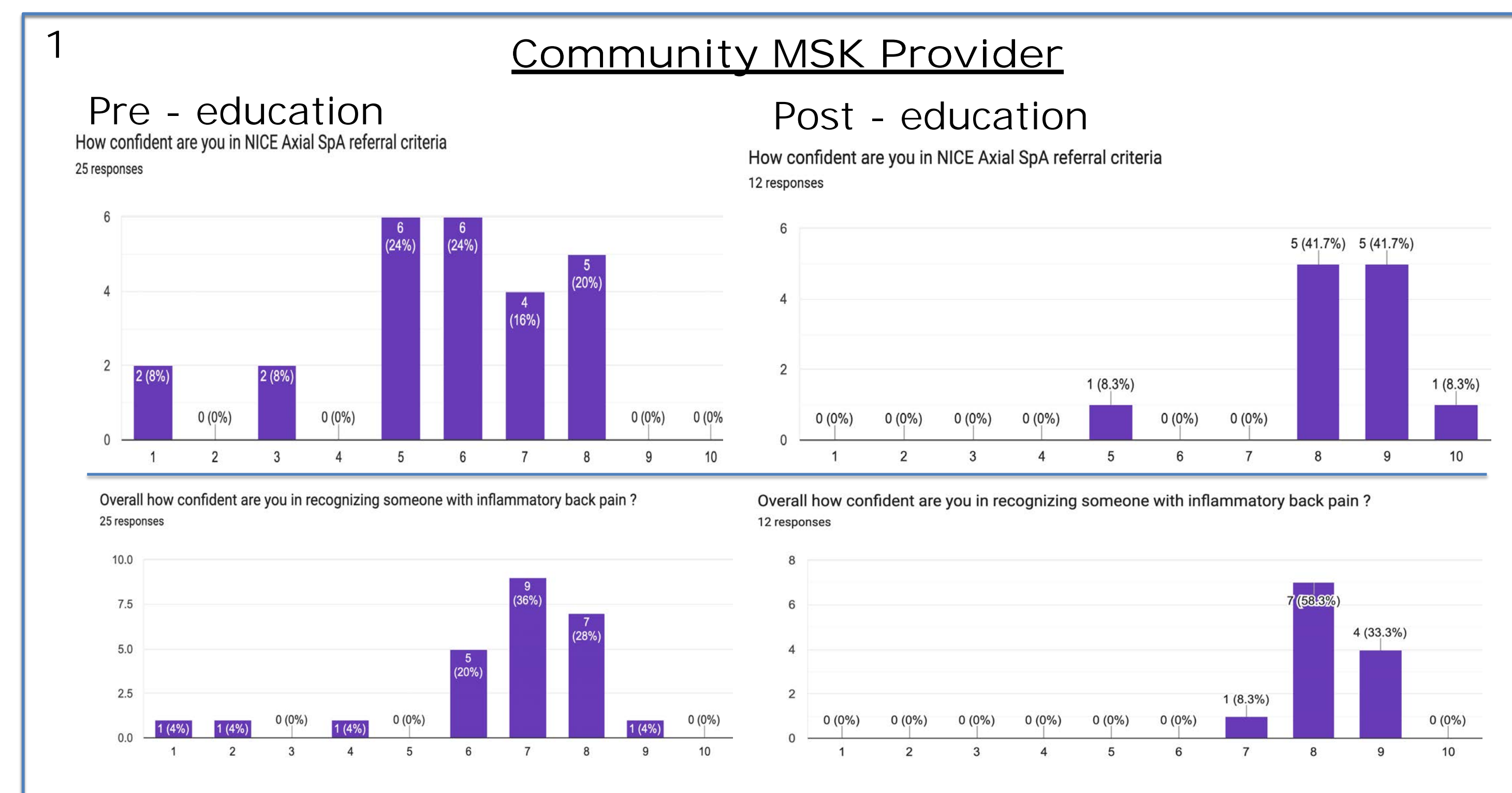
We also plan to embed inflammatory back pain question templates into MSK Physiotherapy service and other primary care assessment systems, in order to improve axial SpA referrals.

„The training and local data really drives home the importance of primary care clinicians to have this on their radar."

Next Steps

- Online content for GP education hub
- Training Delivery – private physiotherapists
- Training delivery – Royal College of Chiropractors
- Networking & training – PCN clinicians
- Data Collection - Questionnaires
- Data Collection – repeat baseline audit

NASS
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