

Plain language summary formats: opinions and preferences of healthcare professionals

Caroline Halford,^a Matt Evans,^b Lydia Alborn,^b and Steve Winter^c

^aSpringer Healthcare, Chester, UK; ^bAdis journals, Springer Healthcare, Chester, UK; ^cinScience Communications, Springer Healthcare, Chester, UK

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Objective

- Plain language content can improve accessibility and understanding of scientific medical research.¹ But, to our knowledge, little is known about healthcare professionals’ (HCPs) perceived value, shareability, and/or preferred format of plain language content.
- This preliminary study aimed to explore HCP opinions of and preferences for different plain language formats.

Research Design & Methods

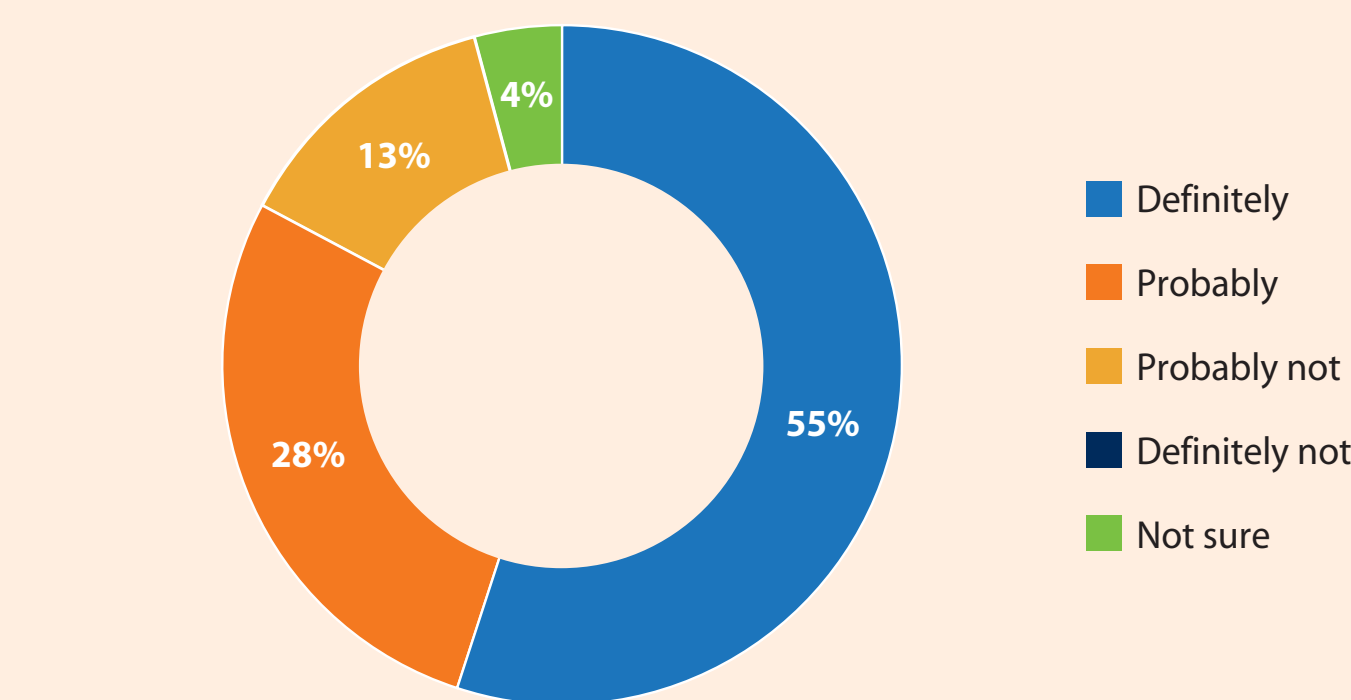
- We shared a peer-reviewed scientific publication containing both a plain language text summary (<250 words) and a plain language graphical summary with 88 dermatologists and 135 neurologists from editorial boards of high-ranking medical journals. Each received an article relevant to their specialism.^{2,3}
- Participants then completed an online survey on their **perceived value**, **shareability**, and **preferred format** of the plain language content.

Results

- Forty-eight HCPs responded to the survey (n=26 dermatology, n=22 neurology).
- Forty (83%) indicated plain language content is “definitely” or “probably” valuable in keeping them informed about research (**Figure 1**).
- Most found the plain language text summary easier to read compared with the graphical format (85% vs 64%; **Figure 2**).

Figure 1

Are these plain language resources valuable?



Note: 0% of those surveyed thought these plain language resources were “definitely not” valuable. Findings are shown for all respondents combined (dermatologists + neurologists)

Figure 3

Which plain language format do you find most useful?

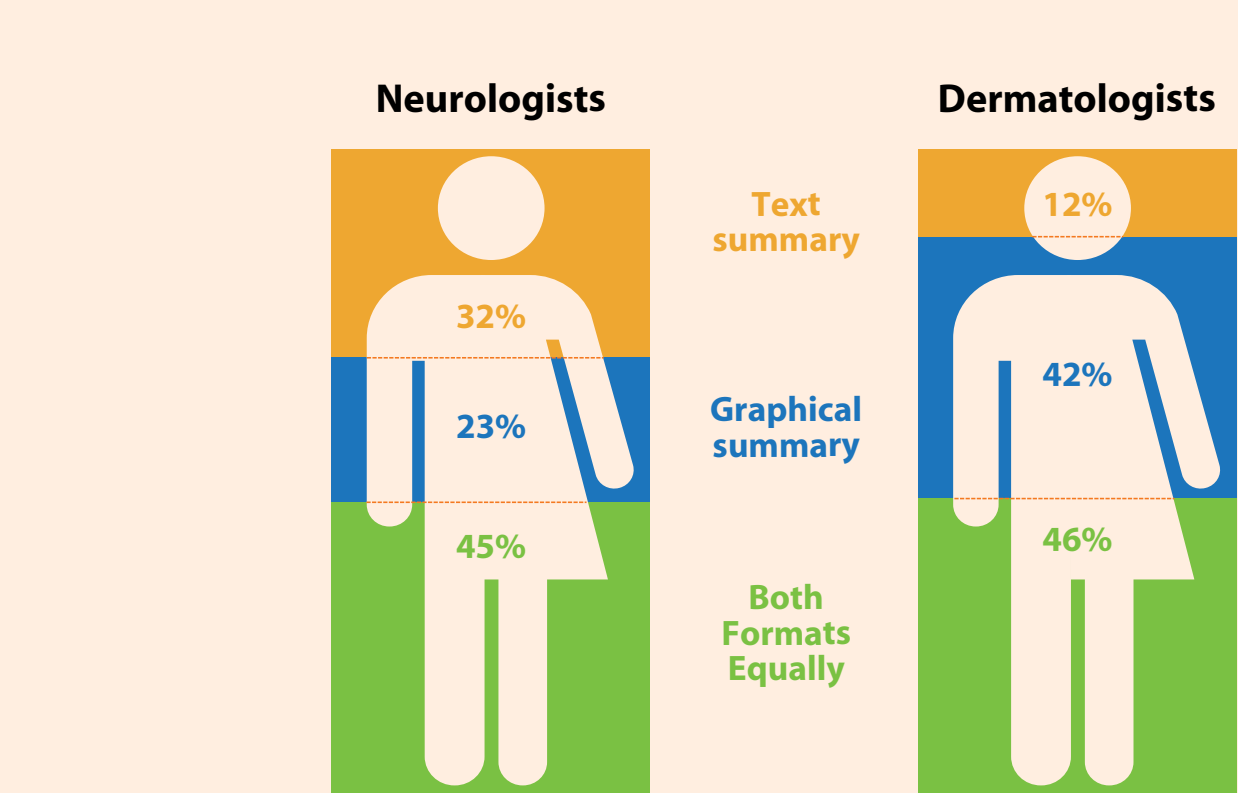
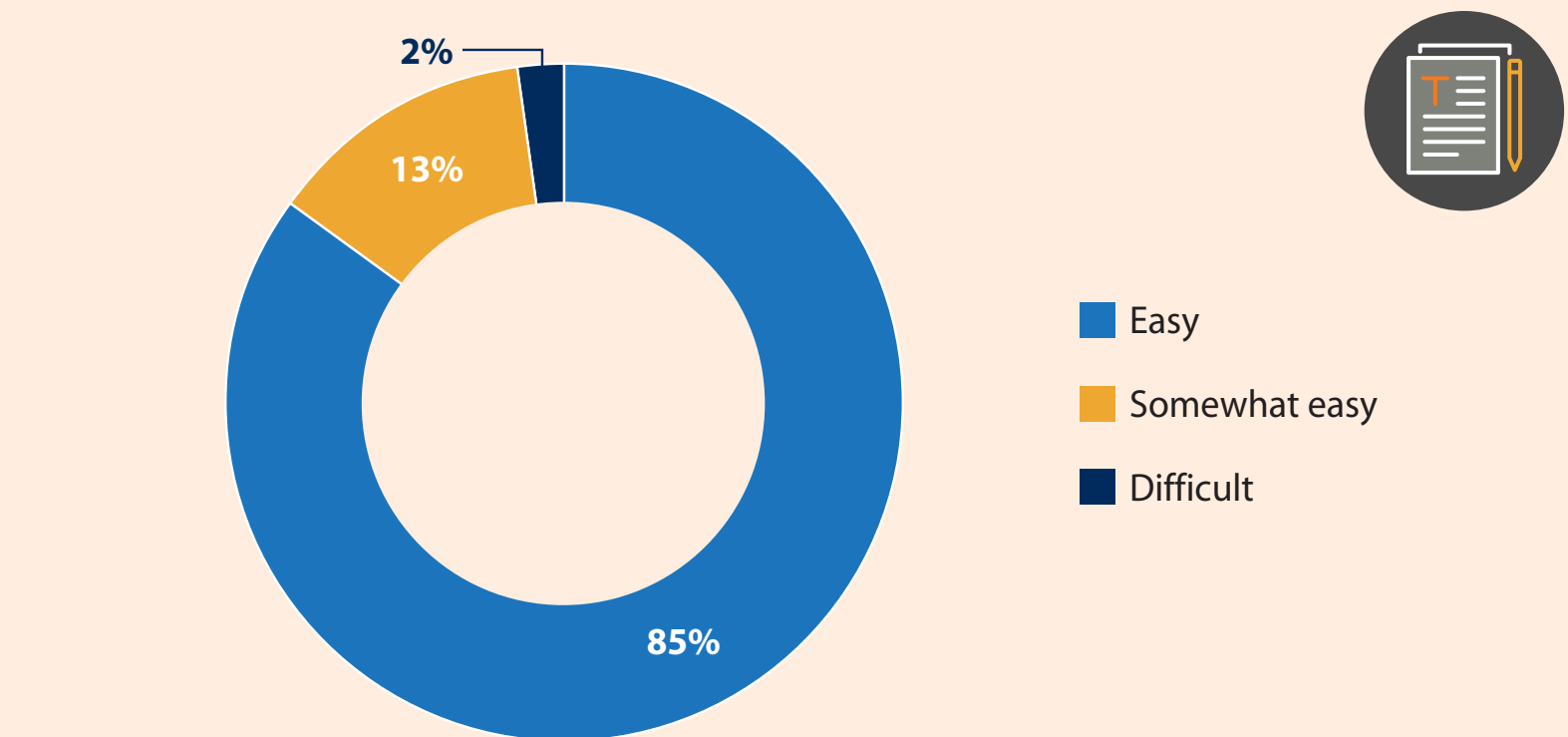


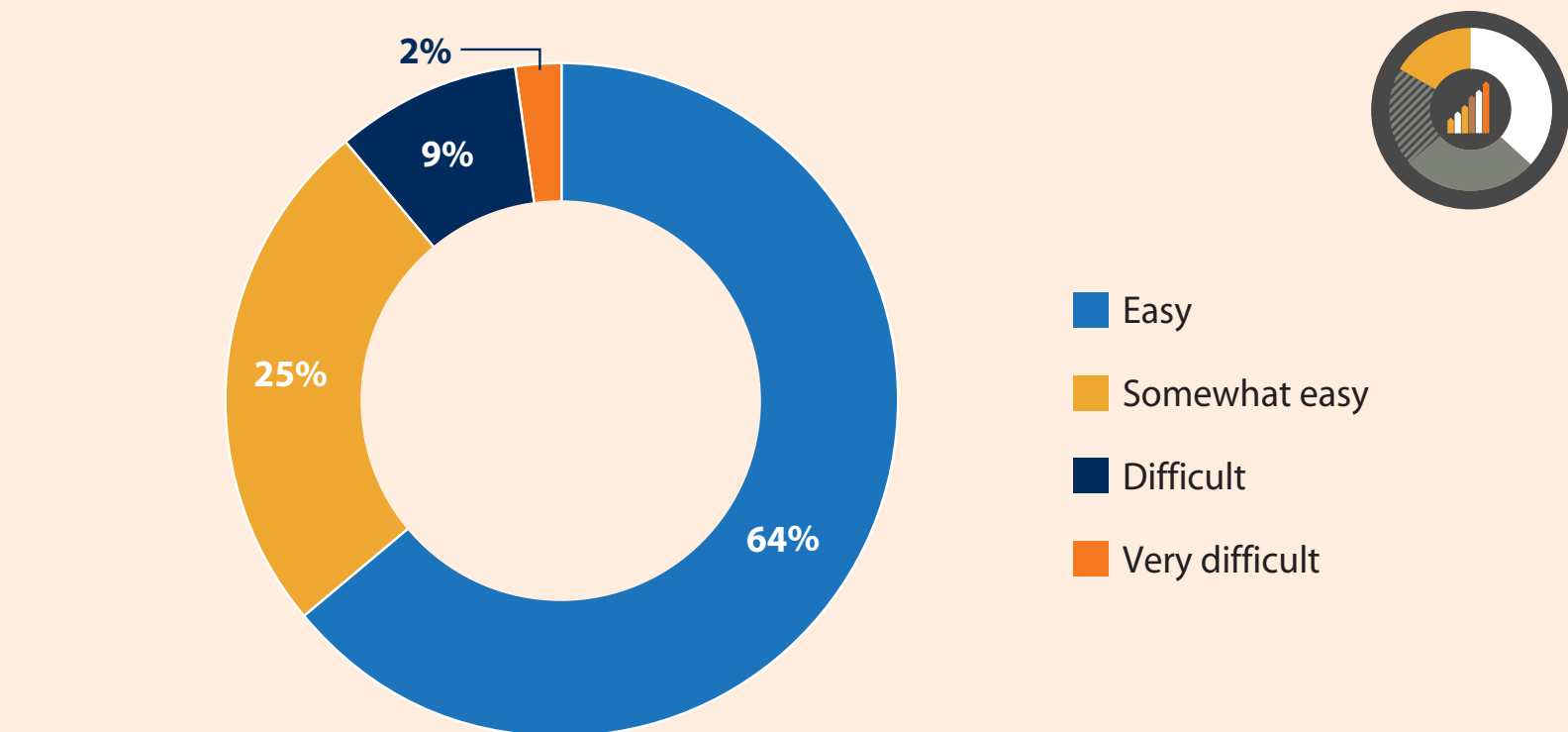
Figure 2

How easy is it to read the plain language text summary?



Note: 0% of those surveyed thought these plain language resources were “definitely not” valuable. Findings are shown for all respondents combined (dermatologists + neurologists)

How easy is it to read the plain language graphical summary?

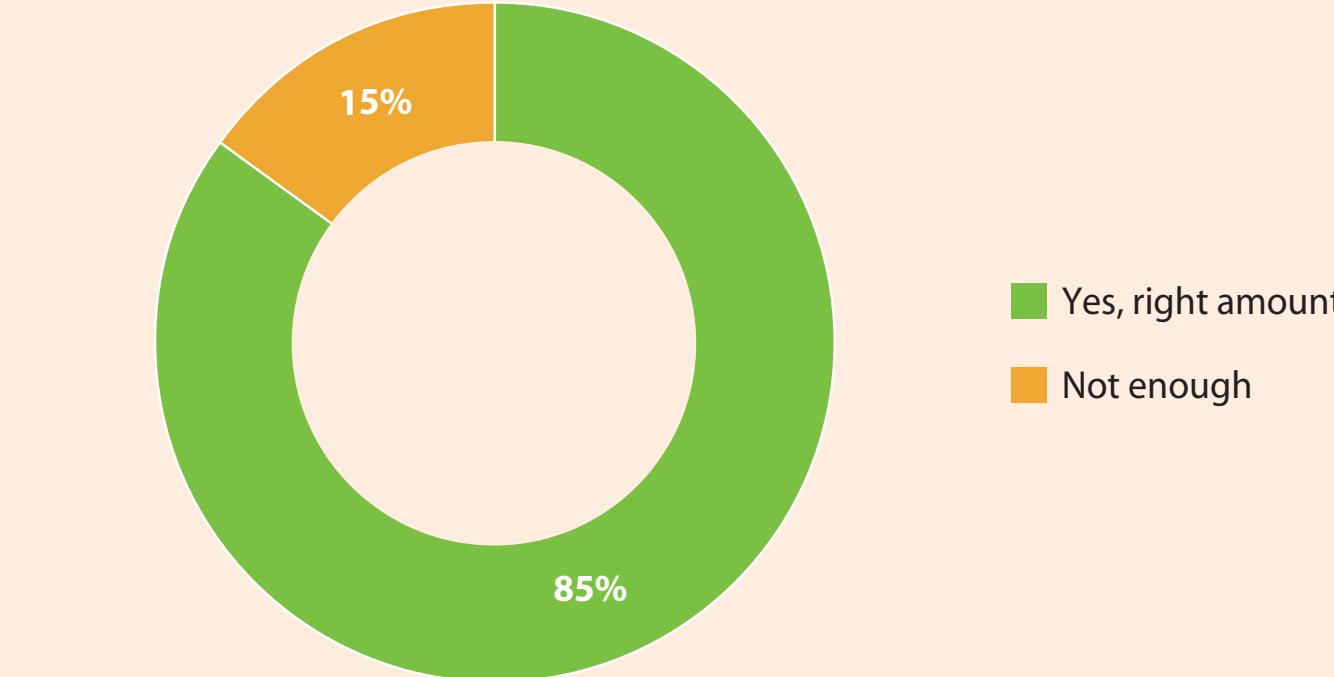


- Neurologists (45%) found text and graphical formats equally valuable, whereas most dermatologists (42%) preferred the plain language graphical summary (**Figure 3**).
- For the plain language text summary, most respondents (85%) felt there was enough detail to understand the study findings (85%) and it was an appropriate length (89%) (**Figure 4**).

- For the plain language graphical summary, 79% said it contained enough detail and the right balance of text/graphics (**Figure 5**).
- Most respondents said they would share both plain language formats with their peers (42%) vs one format alone (**Figure 6**).

Figure 4

Is there enough detail in the plain language text summary?



Is this plain language text summary the right length?

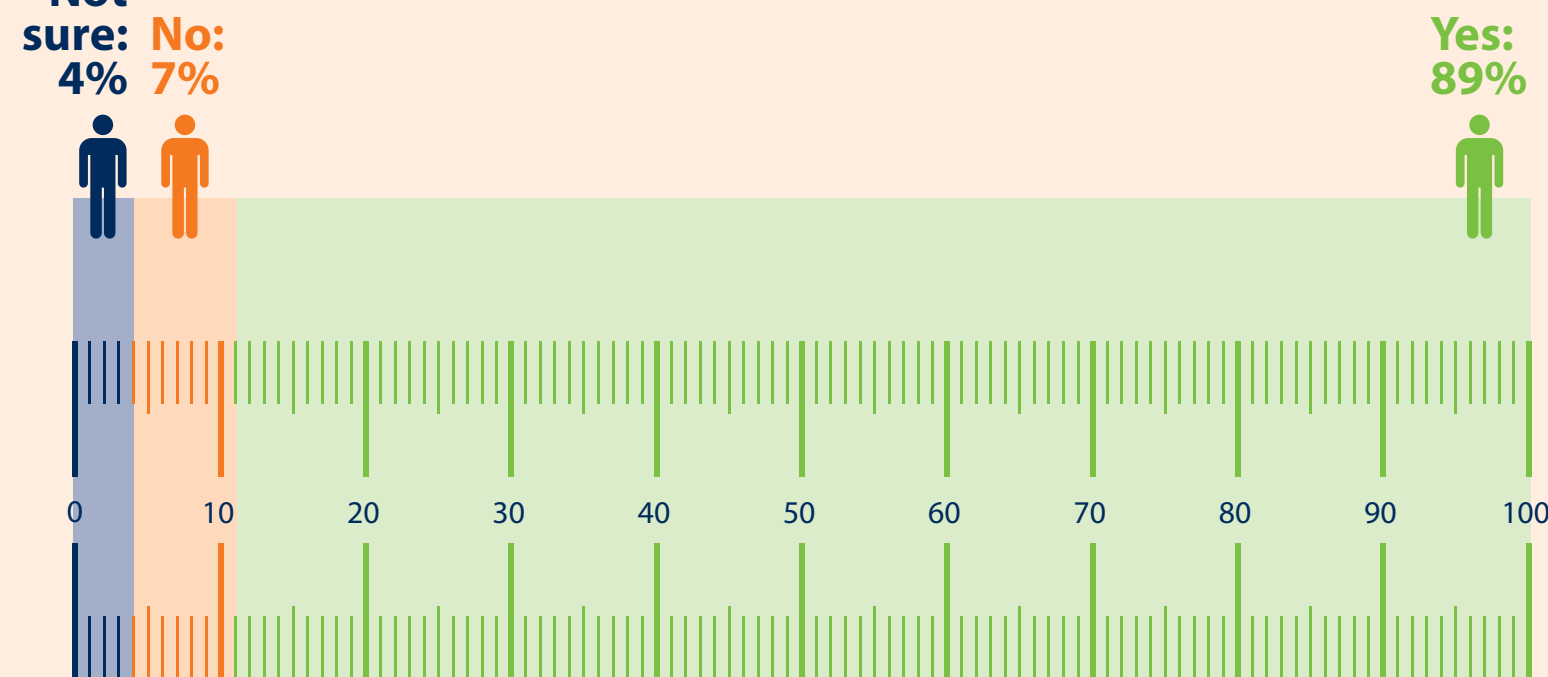
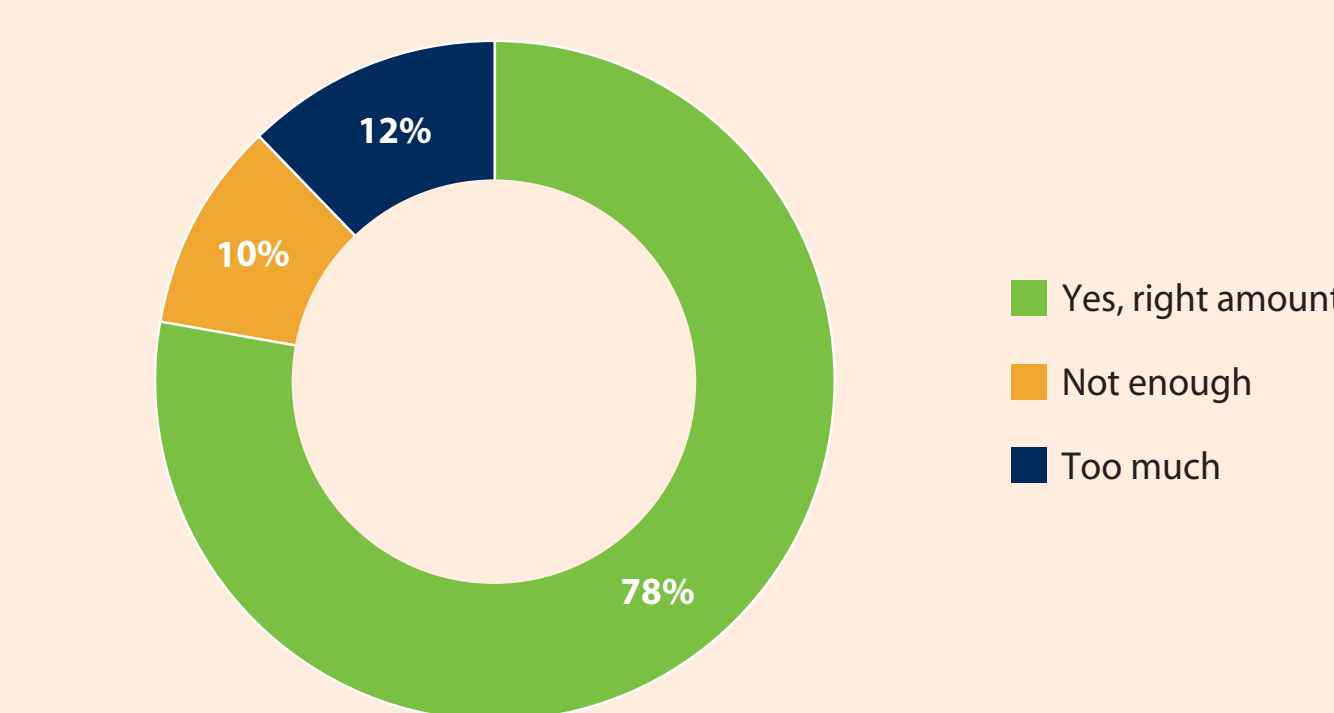


Figure 5

Is there enough detail in the plain language graphical summary?



Does the plain language graphical summary have the right balance of text and graphics?

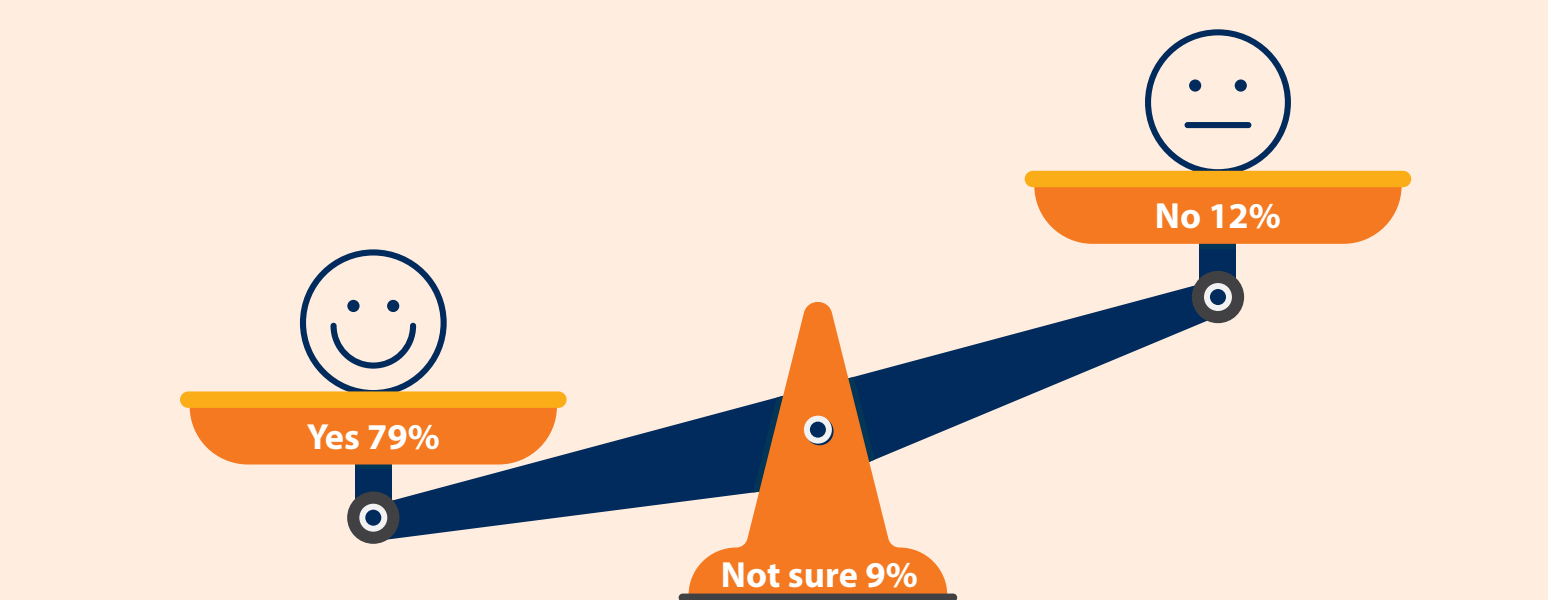
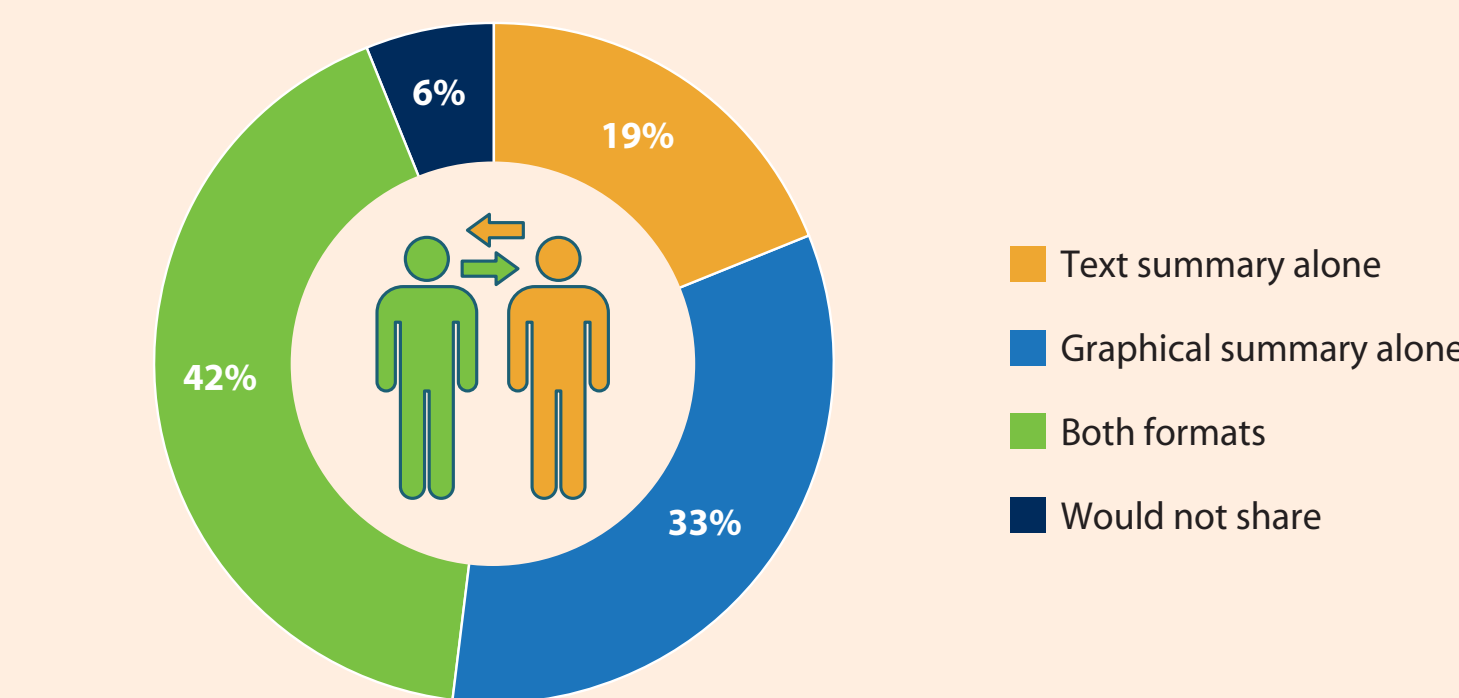


Figure 6

Which plain language format would you share with your peers?



Findings are shown for all respondents combined (dermatologists + neurologists)

Conclusions

- These preliminary results indicate HCPs find both text and graphical plain language content valuable. Both formats were considered sharable with peers.
- Due to differing format preferences, publishing both plain language content formats may help to cater to different learning styles.

References

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