Use of plain language summaries by healthcare professionals: an Open Pharma survey

Pippa Hadland[a], Sarah Thomas[b], Géraldine Drevon[c], Sophie Nobes[d], Slávka Baróniková[e], Jo Gordon[d], Tim Koder[d] and Vicky Sanders[d]

[a]Evidence Generation, Publications and Partnerships, Oncology Business Unit, AstraZeneca, Cambridge, UK; [b]Ipsen, Wrexham, UK; [c]GSK, Wavre, Belgium; [d]Oxford PharmaGenesis, Oxford, UK; [e]Alfasigma S.p.A., Mechelen, Belgium

WHY WAS THIS NEEDED?

- Plain language summaries (PLS) are easy-to-read summaries of scientific research articles.[1]
- Few articles are published with easy-to-read PLS.[2] However, healthcare professionals (HCPs) and other audiences value PLS,[3–5] and pharmaceutical companies are increasingly writing PLS to accompany their articles.[6]
- While these studies show that HCPs value PLS, little is known about how HCPs use PLS and which platforms they use to find PLS. We developed a survey to find out.
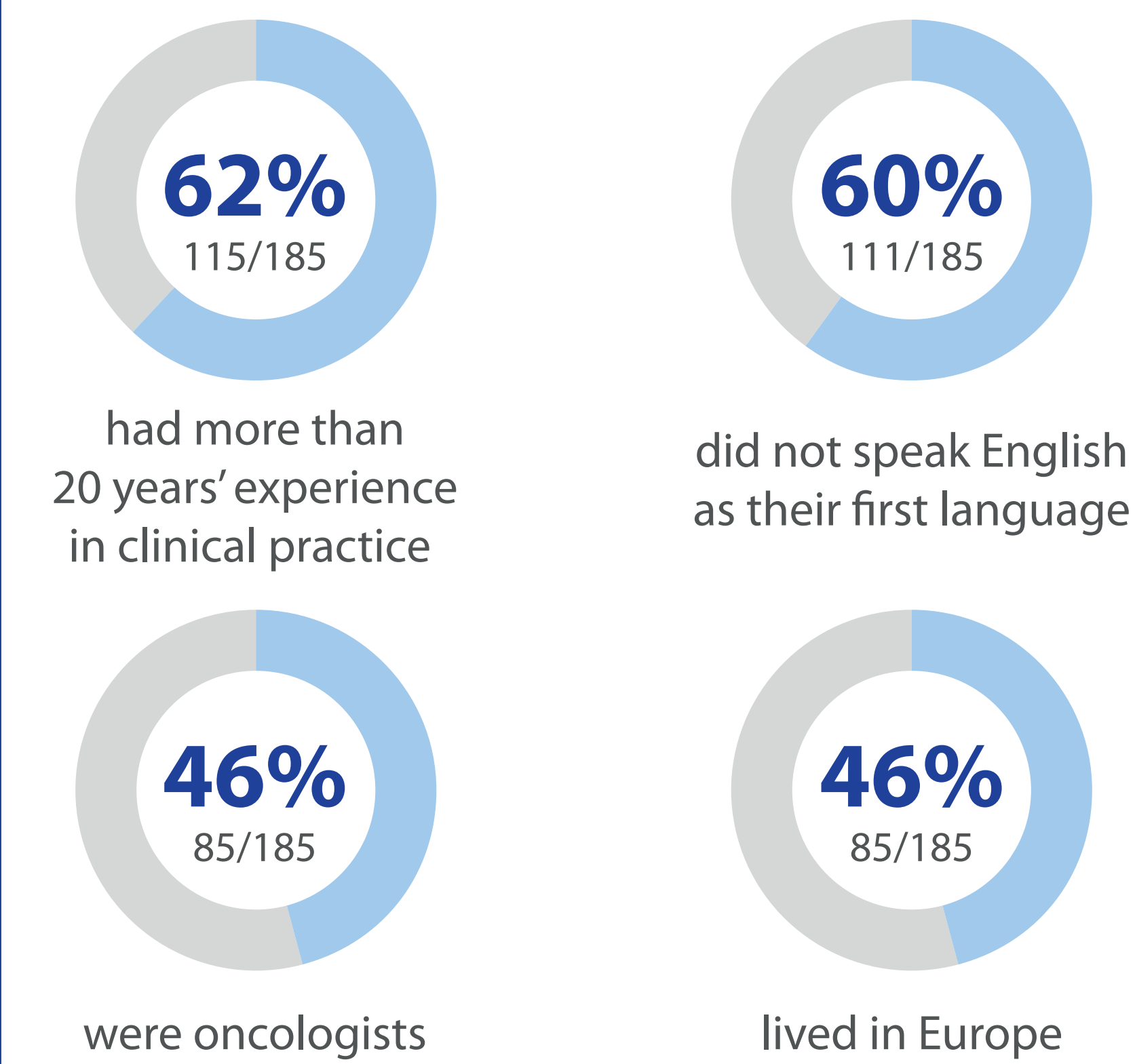
WHAT DID WE DO?

AIMS

- We wanted to know:
  - how HCPs use text-based PLS, and how often
  - how HCPs find text-based PLS
  - what, if anything, could be done to improve how HCPs use and find PLS.
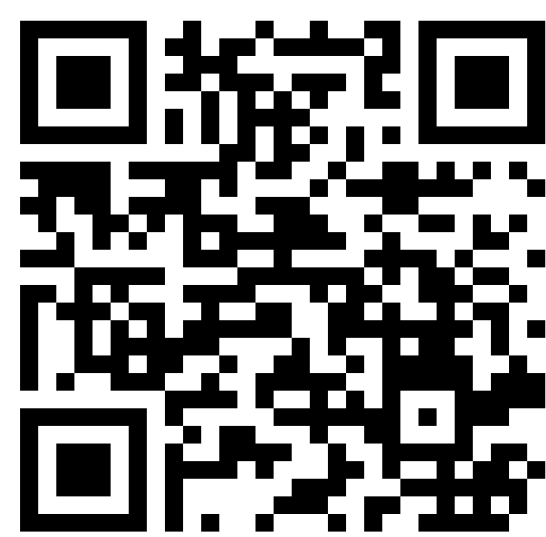
METHODS

- The Open Pharma PLS and discoverability working group designed an 18-question global online survey.
  - A copy of the survey can be accessed by scanning the QR code at the bottom of this poster.
- The survey was sent by email to 5141 individuals who had previously contributed to articles sponsored by AstraZeneca, GSK or Ipsen.
  - Any HCP who had previously been involved with the development of a pharma-sponsored publication was eligible to respond.
- Each participating pharmaceutical company distributed the survey to their contacts.
- The survey was open from 24 April to 17 June 2024.

WHO RESPONDED TO OUR SURVEY?

- A total of 188 people responded to our survey. Three (2%) were excluded because they were not HCPs.
- Of the 185 eligible respondents:

62%
115/185
had more than 20 years' experience in clinical practice

60%
111/185
did not speak English as their first language

46%
85/185
were oncologists

46%
85/185
lived in Europe

VIEW THE E-POSTER AND SURVEY HERE

REFERENCES
1. Rosenberg A et al. Curr Med Res Opin 2021;37:2015–6; **2.** Gattrell W et al. Curr Med Res Opin 2022;38(Suppl 2):41–2; **3.** Lobban D et al. Curr Med Res Opin 2022;38(Suppl 1):32–3; **4.** Southey L et al. Presented at the 2024 European Meeting of ISMPP, London, UK; **5.** Pushparajah D et al. Ther Innov Regul Sci 2018;52:474–81; **6.** Ipsen. Available from: www.ipsen.com/general/our-pledge-summaries-in-plain-language-for-all-journal-publications/ (Accessed 28 August 2024).

HOW DO HCPs USE PLS?

- Most respondents (72%, 133/185) had read or contributed to at least one PLS; 28% (52/185) had not.
- Of the 126 HCPs who did read or contribute to PLS (**Figure 2**), 34% (43/126) were unsure of their institutional positions on sharing PLS with patients, 59% (74/126) were allowed to share PLS with patients and 7% (9/126) were not (data not shown).

Figure 1. HCPs had mostly read or contributed to short, text-based PLS (A), but they considered both short, text-based and infographic PLS to be the most useful PLS formats (B).

	Short (250–300 words), text-based PLS	Infographic PLS (graphical summary)	Standalone PLS of publications	Video PLS	Podcast/ audio PLS
A. Question: Which of the above formats of PLS have you read or contributed to?[a]	**83%** (110/133)	**52%** (69/133)	**28%** (37/133)	**17%** (22/133)	**16%** (21/133)
B. Question: Which of the above PLS formats do you find useful, or think would be useful?[a]	**78%** (104/133)	**71%** (94/133)	**25%** (33/133)	**27%** (36/133)	**23%** (31/133)

[a]Respondents could select one or more options from a predefined, multiple-choice list. The 133 respondents who had read or contributed to at least one PLS answered this question.
HCP, healthcare professional; PLS, plain language summary(ies).

Figure 2. Just 5% of HCPs had never read or used a PLS when an article included one.

Question: When reading articles with a PLS, how often do you typically read and/or use the PLS?[a]

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the time	Always
5% (7/133)	**17%** (23/133)	**42%** (56/133)	**31%** (41/133)	**5%** (6/133)

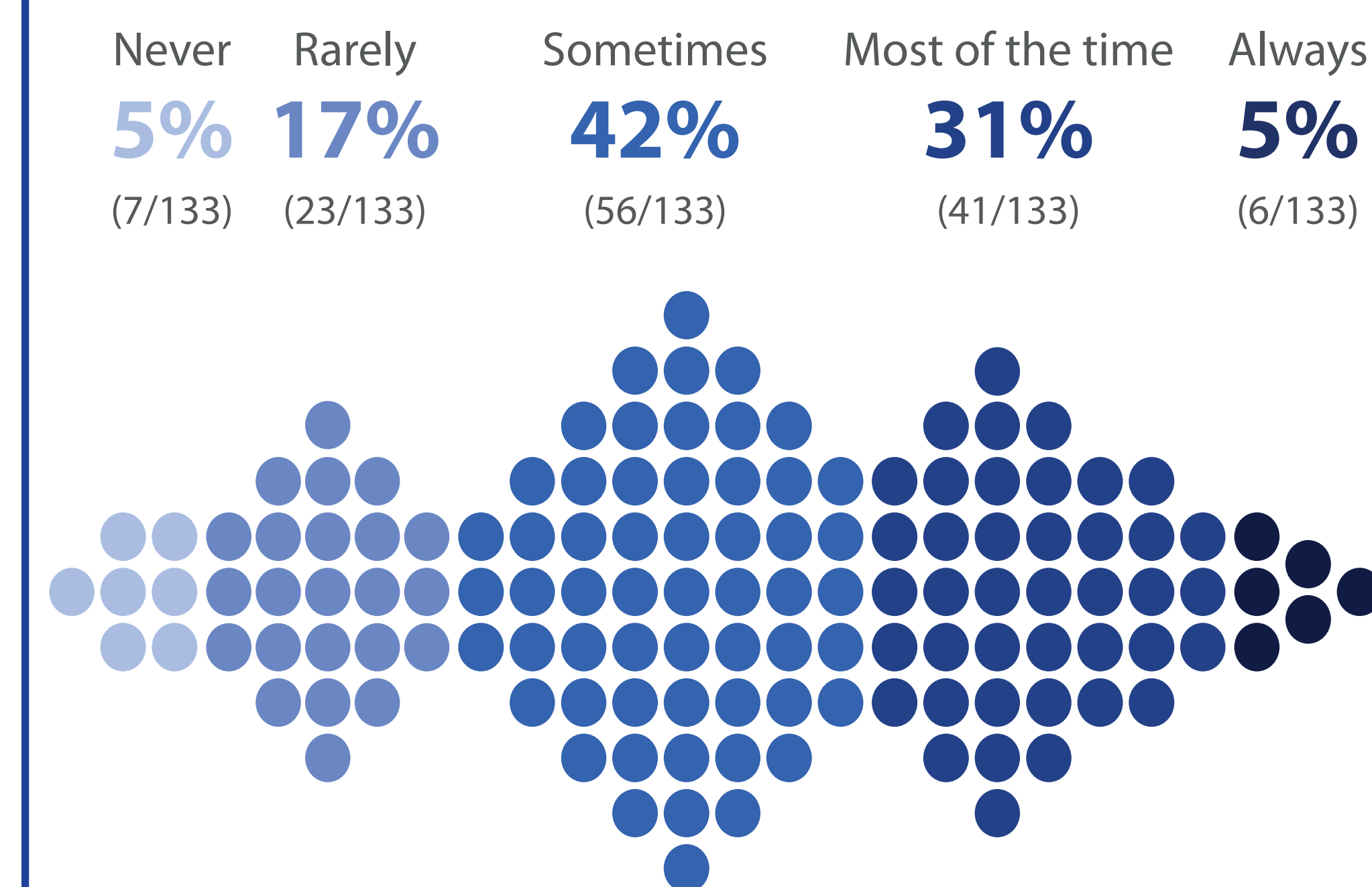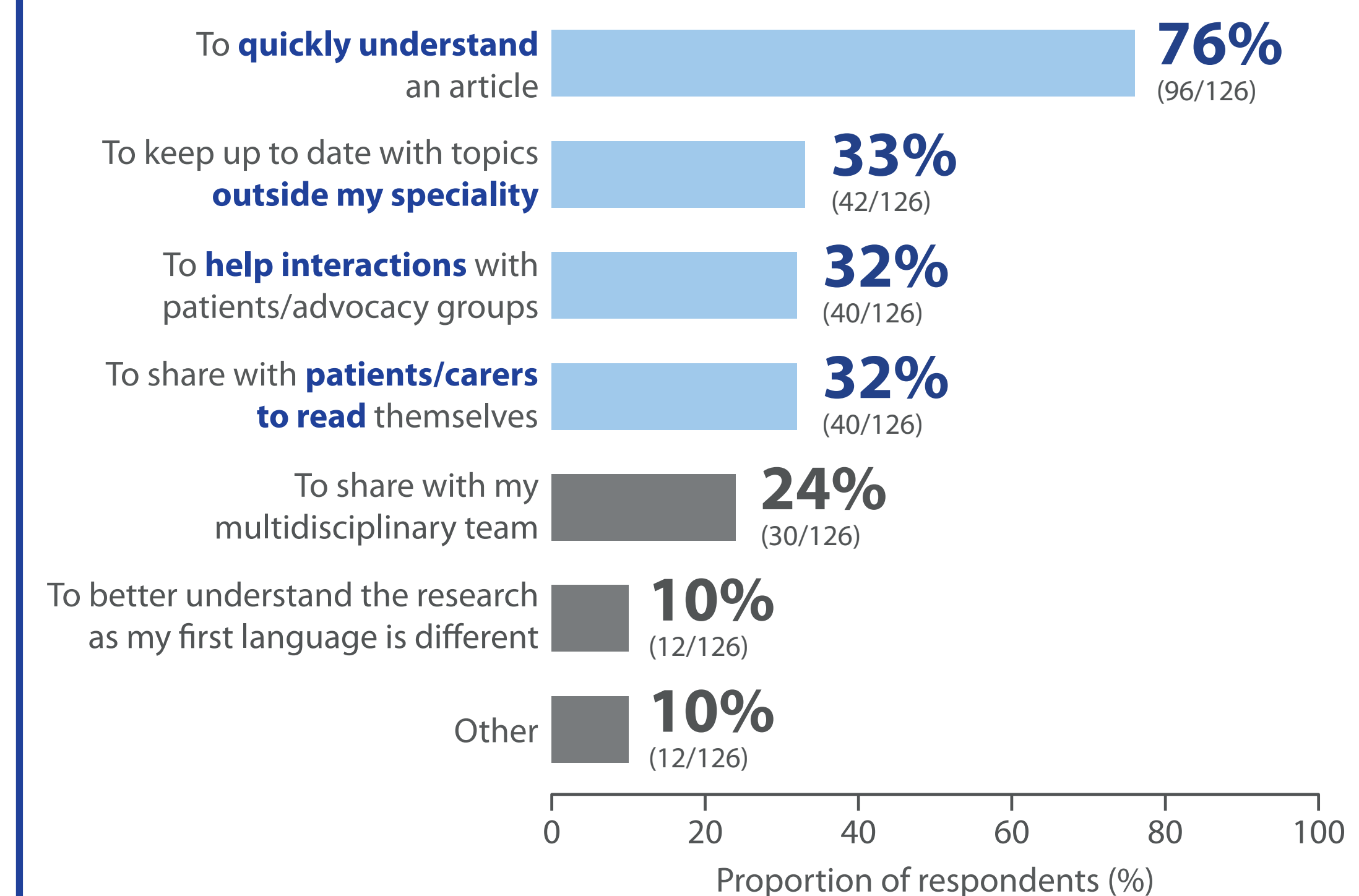Each circle represents one respondent.
[a]The 133 respondents who had read or contributed to at least one PLS answered this question.
HCP, healthcare professional; PLS, plain language summary(ies).

Figure 3. Most of the 126 HCPs who did read or use PLS used them to gain a quick understanding of publications.

Question: How do you typically use PLS?[a]

- To **quickly understand** an article — **76%** (96/126)
- To keep up to date with topics **outside my speciality** — **33%** (42/126)
- To **help interactions** with patients/advocacy groups — **32%** (40/126)
- To share with **patients/carers to read** themselves — **32%** (40/126)
- To share with my multidisciplinary team — **24%** (30/126)
- To better understand the research as my first language is different — **10%** (12/126)
- Other — **10%** (12/126)

Proportion of respondents (%)

[a]Respondents could select one or more options from a predefined, multiple-choice list. Respondents who had 'never' read a PLS (5%, 7/133; Figure 2) did not answer this question.
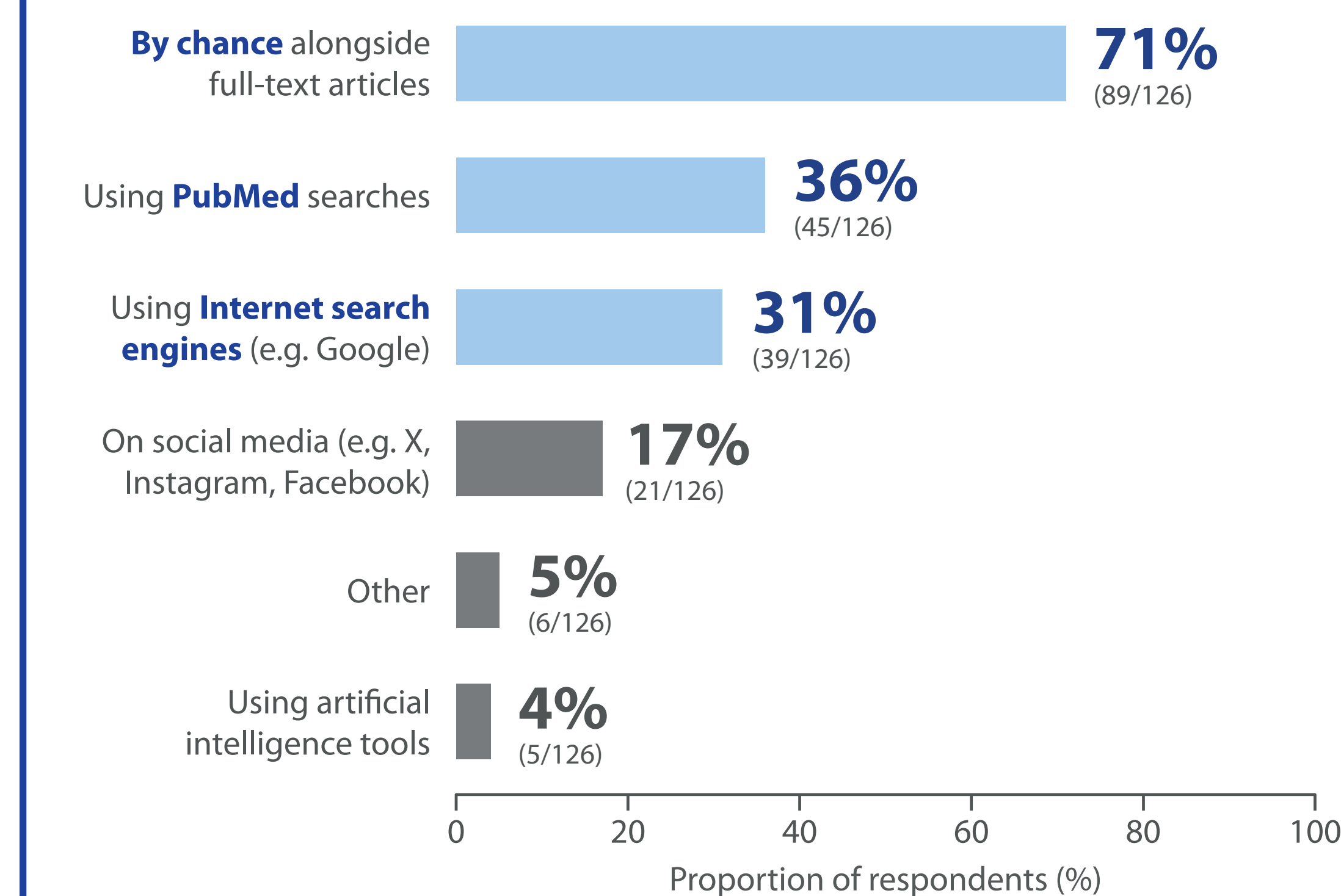HCP, healthcare professional; PLS, plain language summary(ies).

HOW DO HCPs FIND PLS?

- Most HCPs would like all phase 3 (73%, 97/133) and real-world evidence (54%, 72/133) articles to include a PLS (data not shown).
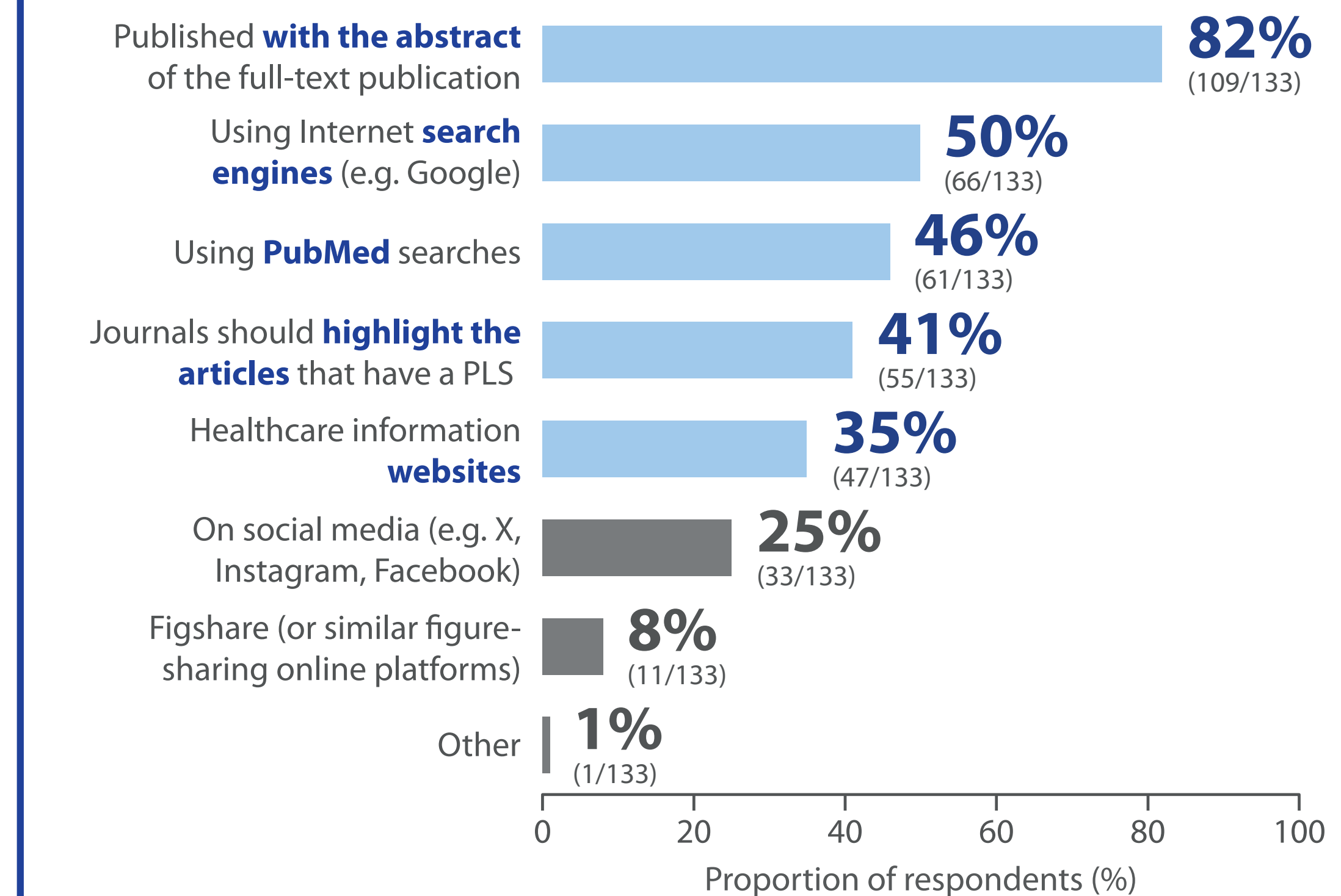
Figure 4. Most HCPs found PLS by chance alongside full-text articles, while one-third used PubMed or Internet searches.

Question: How do you typically find/discover PLS?[a]

- **By chance** alongside full-text articles — **71%** (89/126)
- Using **PubMed** searches — **36%** (45/126)
- Using **Internet search engines** (e.g. Google) — **31%** (39/126)
- On social media (e.g. X, Instagram, Facebook) — **17%** (21/126)
- Other — **5%** (6/126)
- Using artificial intelligence tools — **4%** (5/126)

Proportion of respondents (%)

[a]Respondents could select one or more options from a predefined, multiple-choice list. Respondents who had 'never' read a PLS (5%, 7/133; Figure 2) did not answer this question. HCP, healthcare professional; PLS, plain language summary(ies).

Figure 5. Most HCPs would like a PLS to be published alongside the abstract of a full-text article.

Question: Where would you like to be able to find a PLS?[a]

- Published **with the abstract** of the full-text publication — **82%** (109/133)
- Using Internet **search engines** (e.g. Google) — **50%** (66/133)
- Using PubMed searches — **46%** (61/133)
- Journals should **highlight the articles** that have a PLS — **41%** (55/133)
- Healthcare information **websites** — **35%** (47/133)
- On social media (e.g. X, Instagram, Facebook) — **25%** (33/133)
- Figshare (or similar figure-sharing online platforms) — **8%** (11/133)
- Other — **1%** (1/133)

Proportion of respondents (%)

[a]Respondents could select one or more options from a predefined, multiple-choice list. The 133 respondents who had read or contributed to at least one PLS answered this question.
HCP, healthcare professional; PLS, plain language summary(ies).

WHAT DOES THIS TELL US?

- PLS are a helpful method of communicating scientific research to time-poor HCPs.
- Most HCPs find PLS by chance alongside full-text articles.
- HCPs would like to see more biomedical research publications include a short, text-based PLS, and they would like PLS to be published alongside the abstract in the full-text article.
- Publishing more PLS and improving how they are found will help broaden the impact of scientific research.