

Improving primary care access to specialty expertise: Implementation of an eConsult program

Sharon Rikin, MD, MS, Eric Epstein, MD, Matthew Berger, MD, Anna Broder, MD, Joann Kwah, MD, Raphael Hulkower, MD, Jason Giordani, Ravi Budhan, MD, Joseph DeLuca, MD, Julia Arnsten, MD, MPH, MPH, Yaron Tomer, MD

Problem

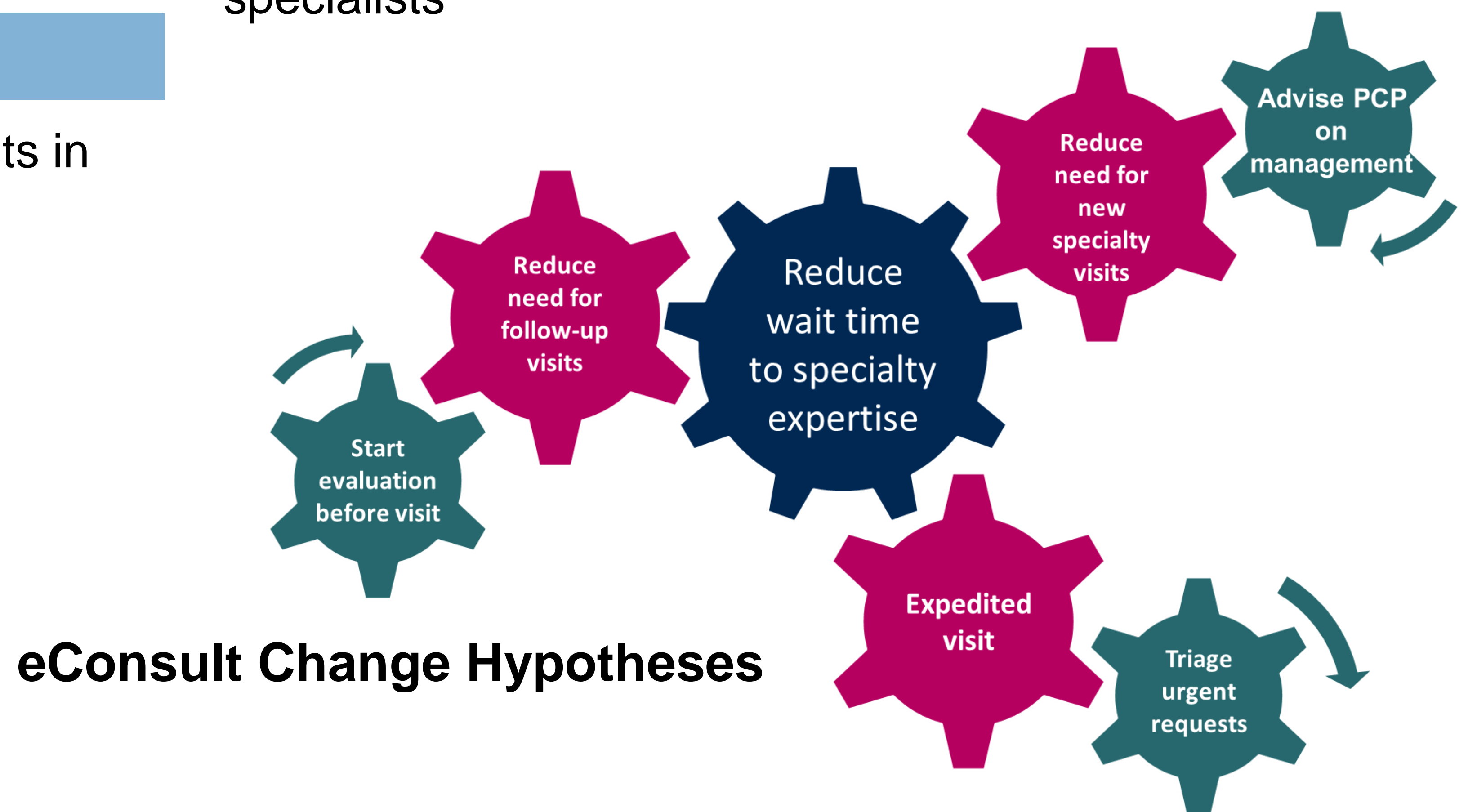
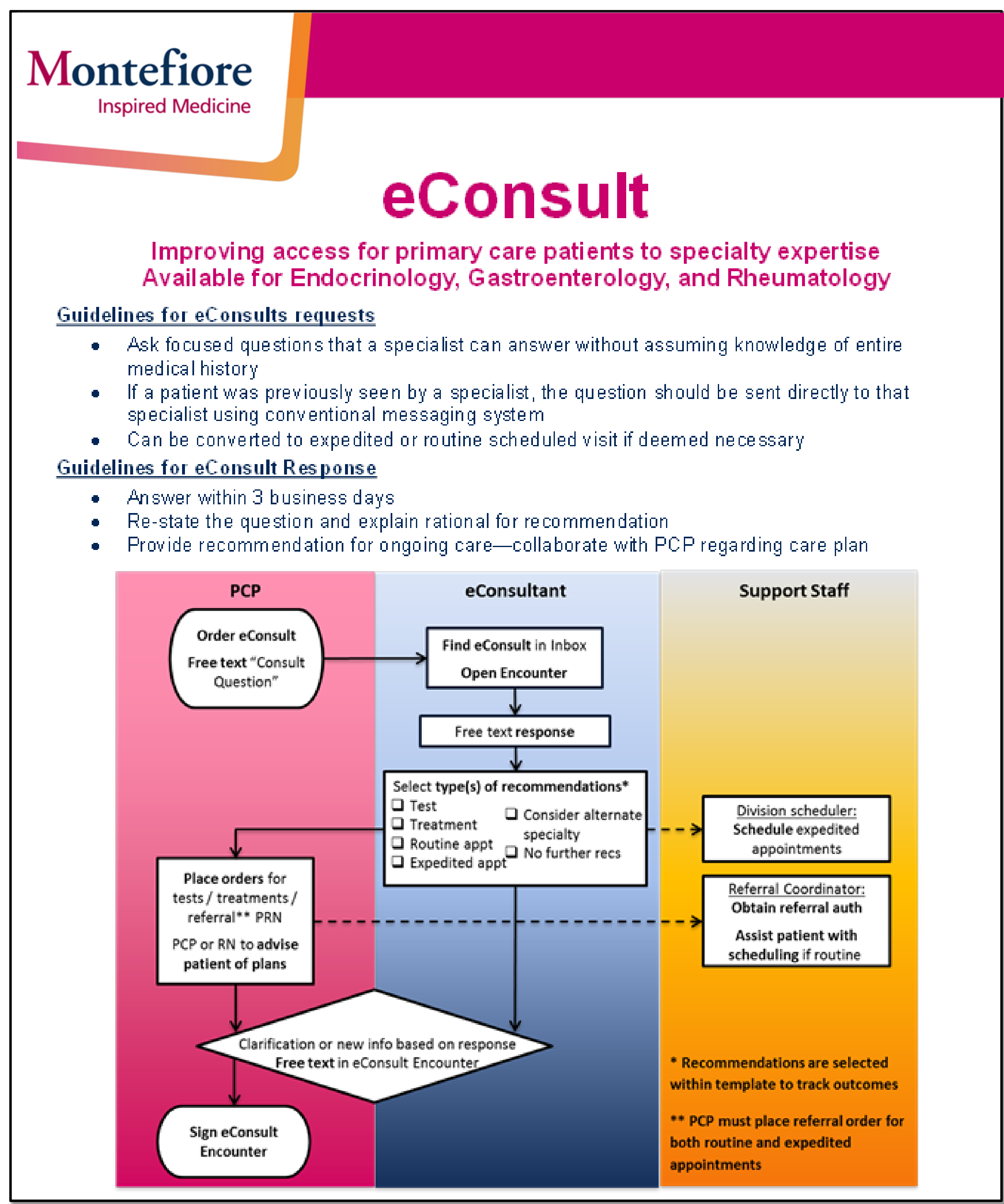
- Up to 35% of primary care patients referred to specialists annually
- Long wait times
- Appointments not scheduled based on urgency

Opportunities for Improvement

- Diagnostic **testing prior to first appointment**
- Address some consult questions **without a face-to-face visit**
- **Communication** between primary care providers (PCPs) and specialists

Project Aims

- Increase **utilization of eConsults** to 25% of all consult requests in next year
- Reduce demand for specialty appointments
- Ensure PCP satisfaction



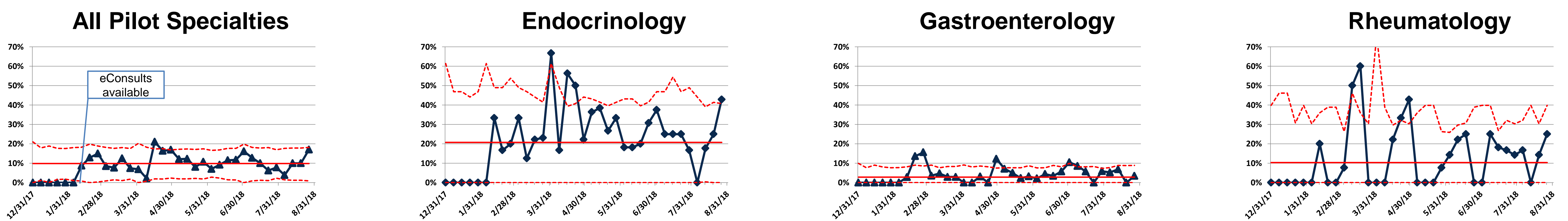
Project Design

- **Interdisciplinary team:** Executive leadership, quality improvement leadership, PCPs, specialists, information technology analysts, administrators, schedulers, and finance directors.
- **Pilot program** at three primary care sites and among three specialties
- eConsult order and encounter created within the **electronic health record**
 - **Opt-in process** for initiating consult vs. usual care via routine referral
 - **Free text question and response**
- Selection of **designated eConsultants**
- **On-site training for PCPs**
- **Compensation plan for eConsultants and PCPs**

Results

Utilization: Proportion of eConsults / all consult requests by week

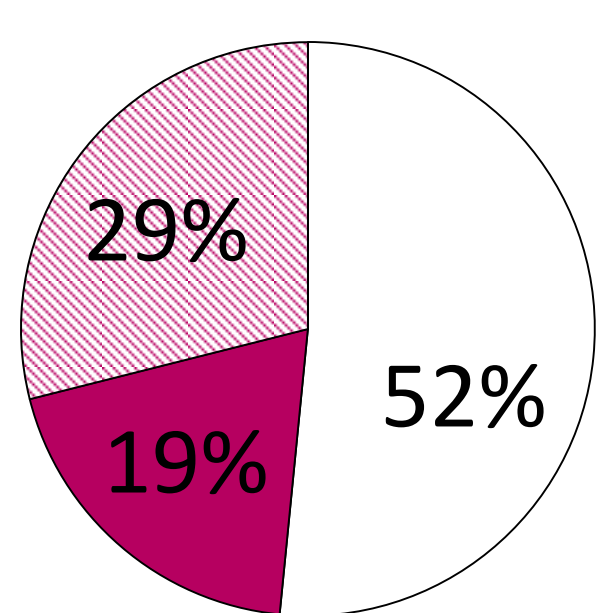
◆ eConsult/(eConsult + Routine Referral) — Average - - - Lower Confidence Limit - - - Upper Confidence Limit



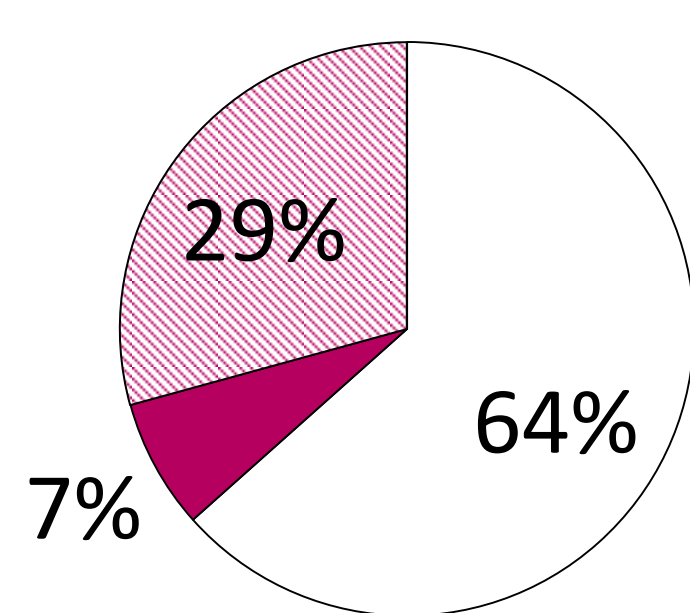
Appointment recommendation following eConsults

□ No appointment ■ Expedited appointment ▨ Routine appointment

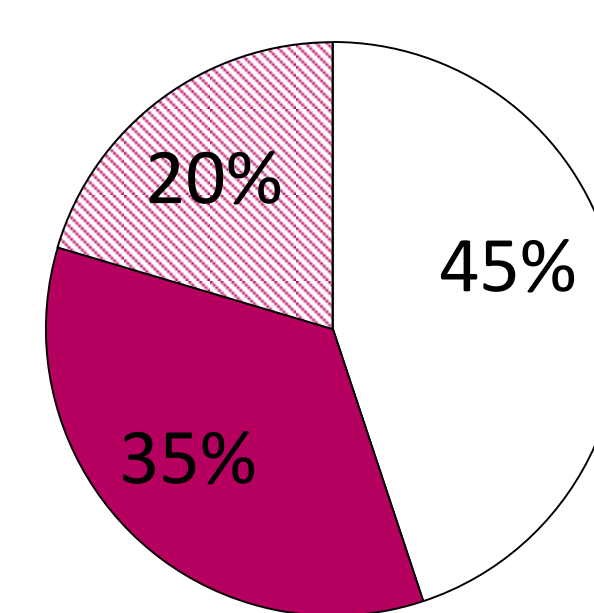
All Pilot Specialties (n=159)



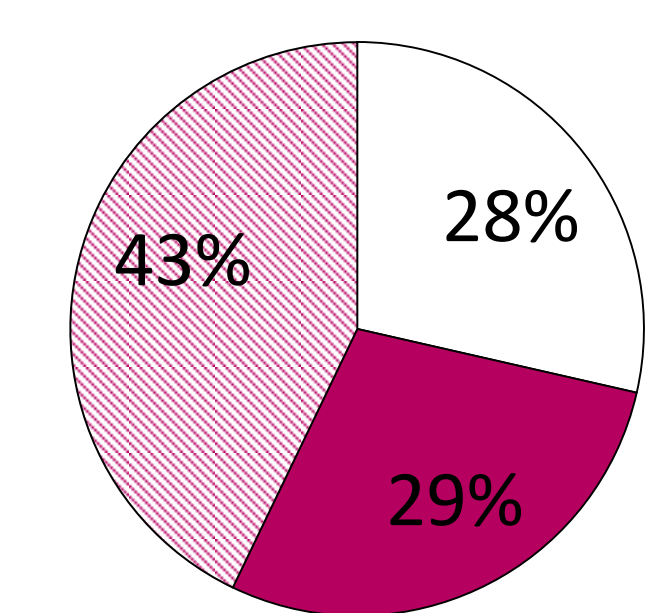
Endocrinology (n=82)



Gastroenterology (n=49)

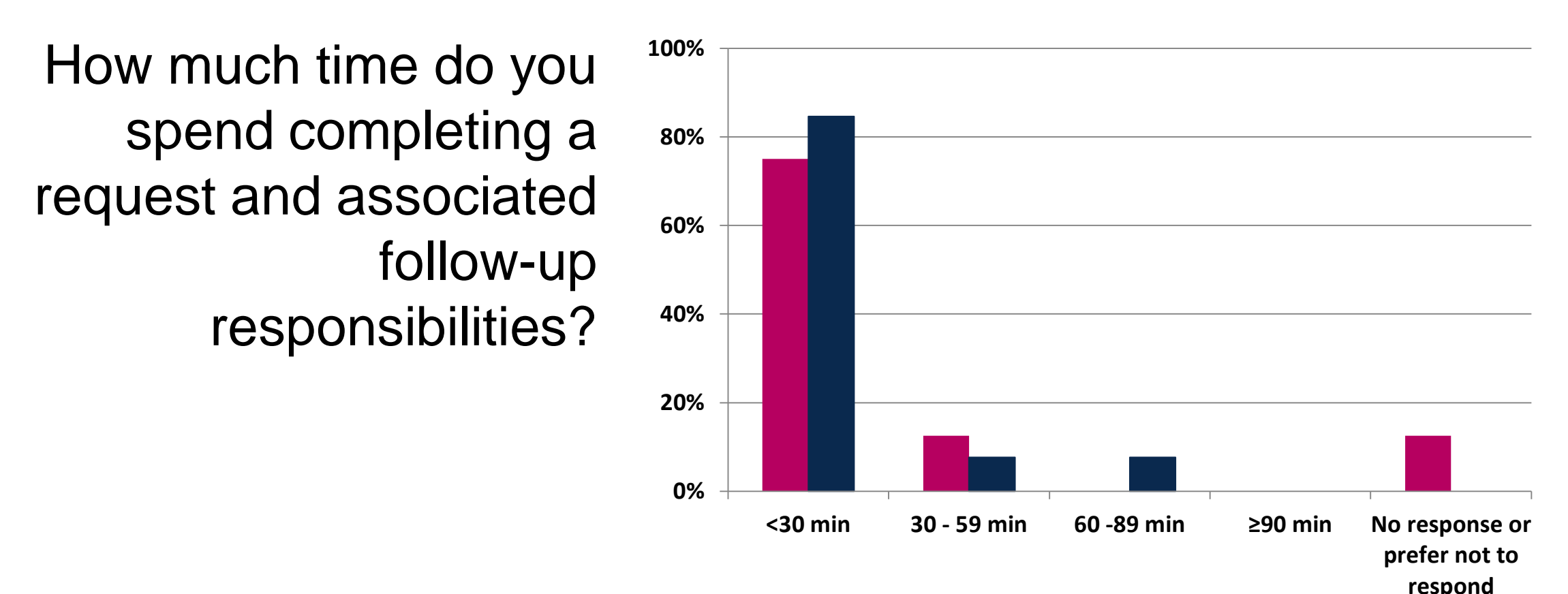
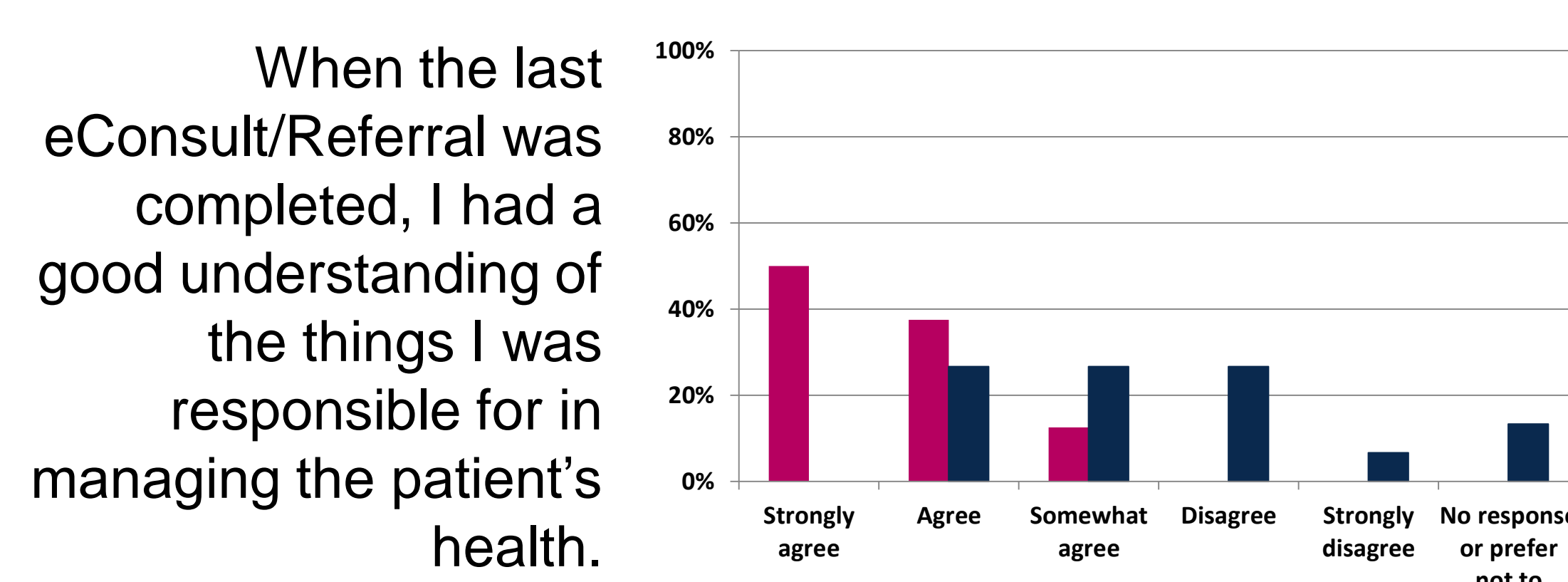
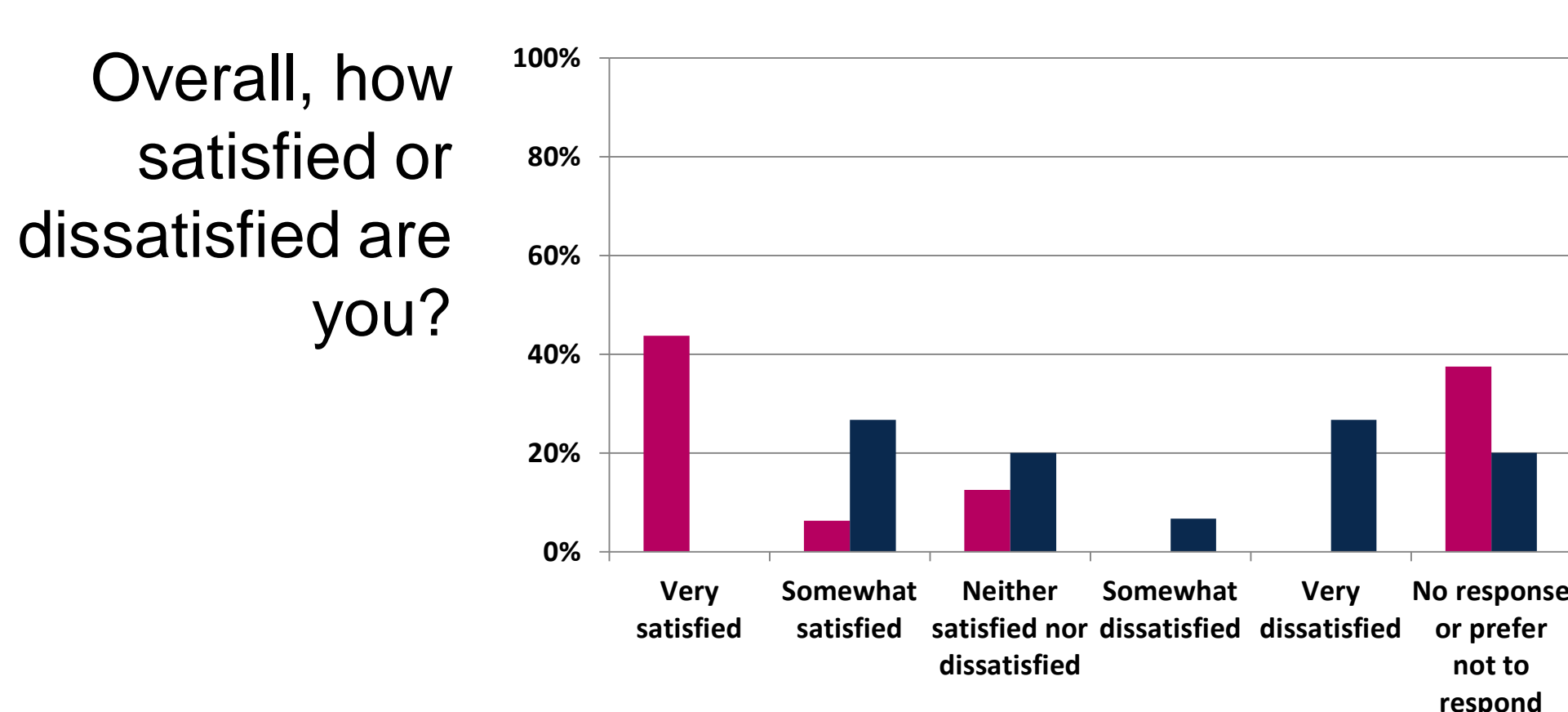


Rheumatology (n=28)



Balancing Measures: PCP Survey (n=16)

■ eConsults ■ Routine Referrals



Lessons Learned and Next Steps

- eConsult uptake and appointment outcomes differ by specialty
- Outcomes will be used to build capacity for number of eConsultants and for expedited appointments
- Plan to evaluate the impact of eConsults on wait time to appointments and quality of care
- Plan to scale to additional primary care sites and specialties