

Examining the Patient Experience of Medication Management and Communication with the Outpatient Pharmacy

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Background

- Supporting patients to manage their medications and health care is an integral role of pharmacy practice.¹ The Alfred Health Outpatient Pharmacy provides specialised medications to patients across Australia. Patients with organ transplants, cystic fibrosis and HIV are among the patients who access the pharmacy's services.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, infection prevention measures required many patients to access the pharmacy remotely (e.g., phone and email) and have medications posted.
- To streamline the ordering process for patients and enhance access to medications, an Online Medication Ordering Form (OMOF) was introduced in May 2022. The OMOF improved workflow in the pharmacy and continues to be used by many patients.²
- As part of Standard 2 "Partnering with Consumers" of the National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) standards,³ it was important for the Outpatient Pharmacy to evaluate the useability and sustainability of the OMOF, and the impact remote service delivery has for patients and their health care.

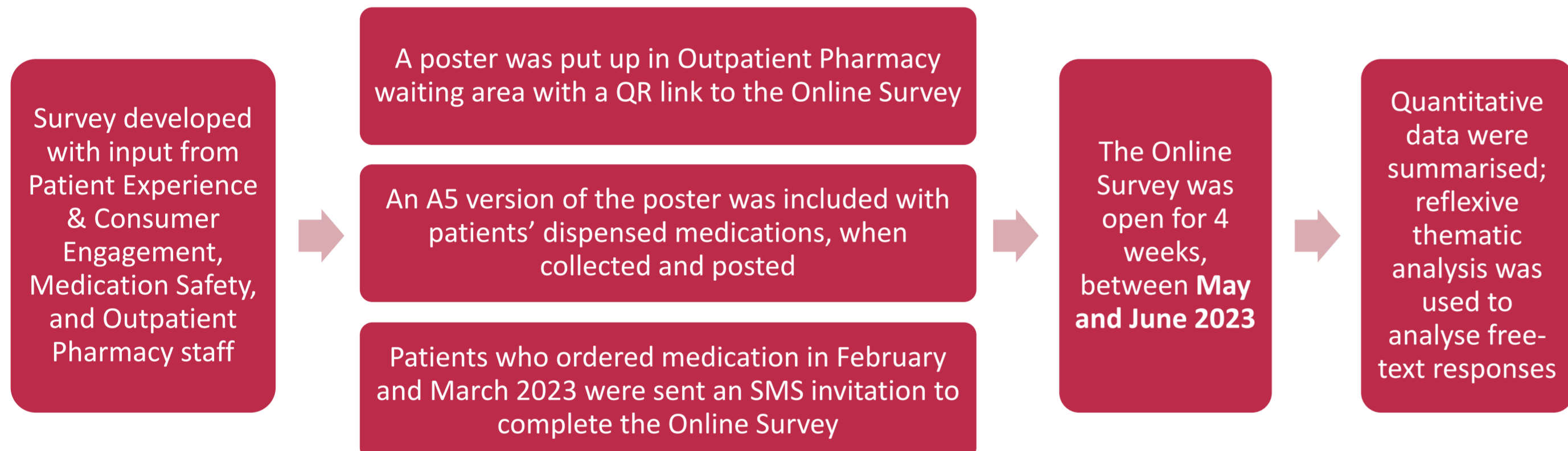
Aim

- To evaluate patient communication pathways with Alfred Health Outpatient Pharmacy, the impact the OMOF has on patients' medication management, and to engage patients in feedback to guide improvements and future practice for the pharmacy.

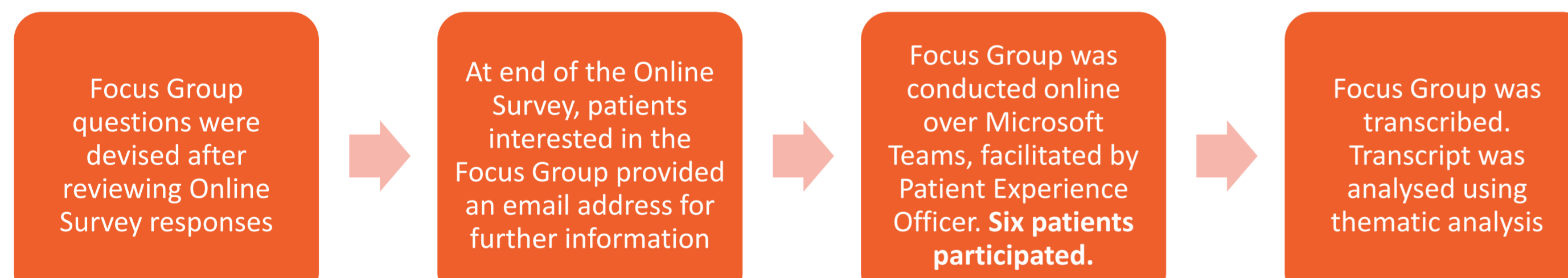
Method

- An Online Survey and Patient Focus Group were used to evaluate patients' experiences engaging with the pharmacy and ordering medications.
- The Online Survey questions focused on patients' interactions with the pharmacy, their experience ordering medication, useability of the OMOF and how patients currently manage their medications.
- Participant responses were anonymous and included 25 multiple-choice and free-text questions online via a secure link to the Alfred Health REDCap platform.

Online Survey development and participant recruitment



Patient Focus Group development, recruitment and analysis



- Themes were analysed in respect to the *Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights: Access, Safety, Respect, Partnership, Information, Privacy, and Give Feedback*.⁴

Results

Survey Demographics

Table 1. Participant demographics

Online Survey		
Patients sent link by SMS message	1,701	
Completed survey responses	582	
Survey response rate	34.2%	
Patients interested in Focus Group	48	
Participant clinics attended (n = 582)		
Respiratory	243	41.8%
Haematology/Oncology	88	15.1%
Cardiology	76	13.1%
Infectious Diseases	51	8.8%
Renal	27	4.7%
Gastroenterology	12	2.1%
Other	89	15.3%

Medication Ordering

Online Survey question: How do you usually communicate with us to request your prescriptions to be filled? (Select all that apply)

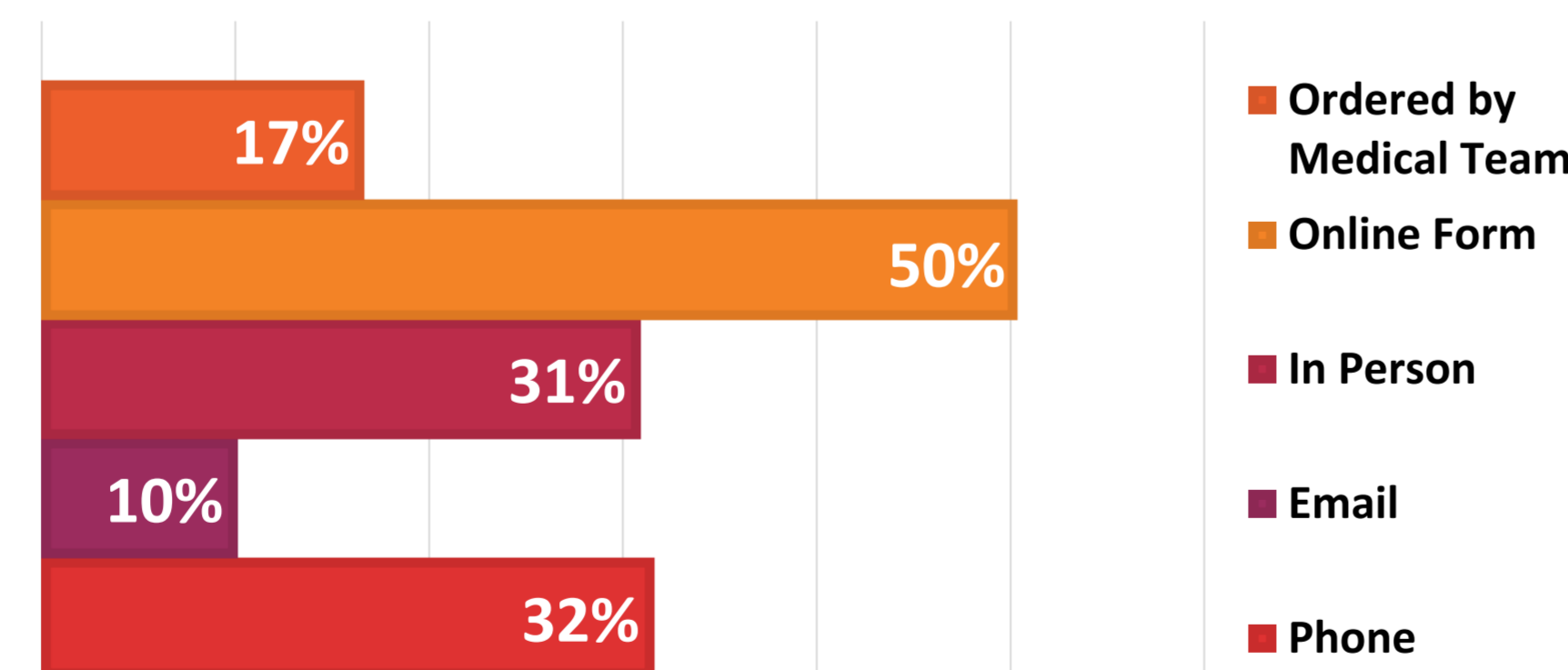


Figure 1. Most used medication ordering methods in 6 months (Total = 582)
NB: Total percentage > 100%, as patients could select multiple options

Online Medication Ordering Form (OMOF)

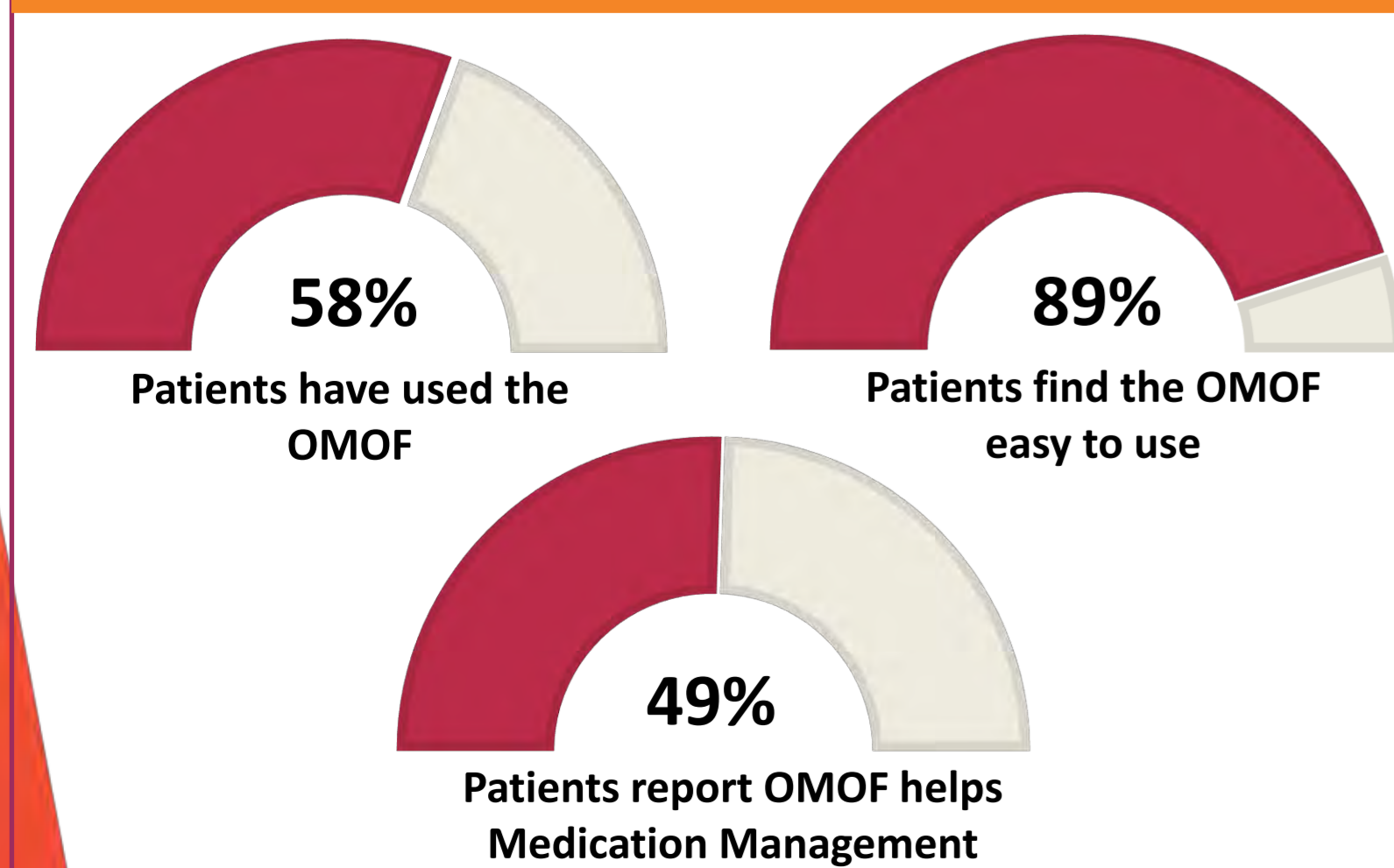


Figure 2. Summary of patients' experience and use of OMOF

Table 2. Patients' reasons for not using OMOF

Patients that never used OMOF (n = 246, 42%)		
Prefer to speak to a person	91	36.9%
Lack information or confidence to complete OMOF correctly	37	15.0%
Do not own computer	21	8.5%
Unaware of OMOF	55	22.4%
Other	47	19.1%

Results

Medication Management

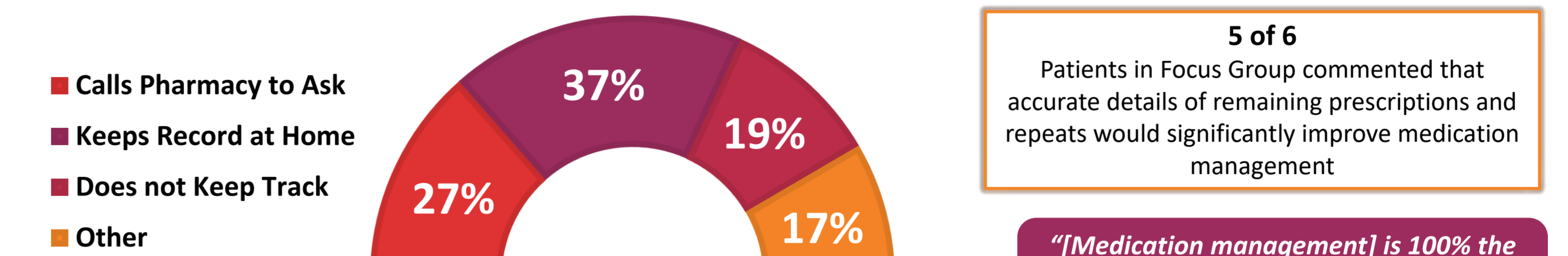


Figure 3. Most common method of tracking prescription repeats kept in the Outpatient Pharmacy

1 in 5 Patients report not discussing new or changed medications with Outpatient Pharmacy

Online Survey question: Why do you think this information was not discussed? - example responses:

- Counselled in Specialist Outpatient Clinic
- Already aware, no recent medication or dose changes
- Time pressures when collecting medication
- Online ordering, medication posted

Figure 4. Patients' reasons for not discussing medications with pharmacy

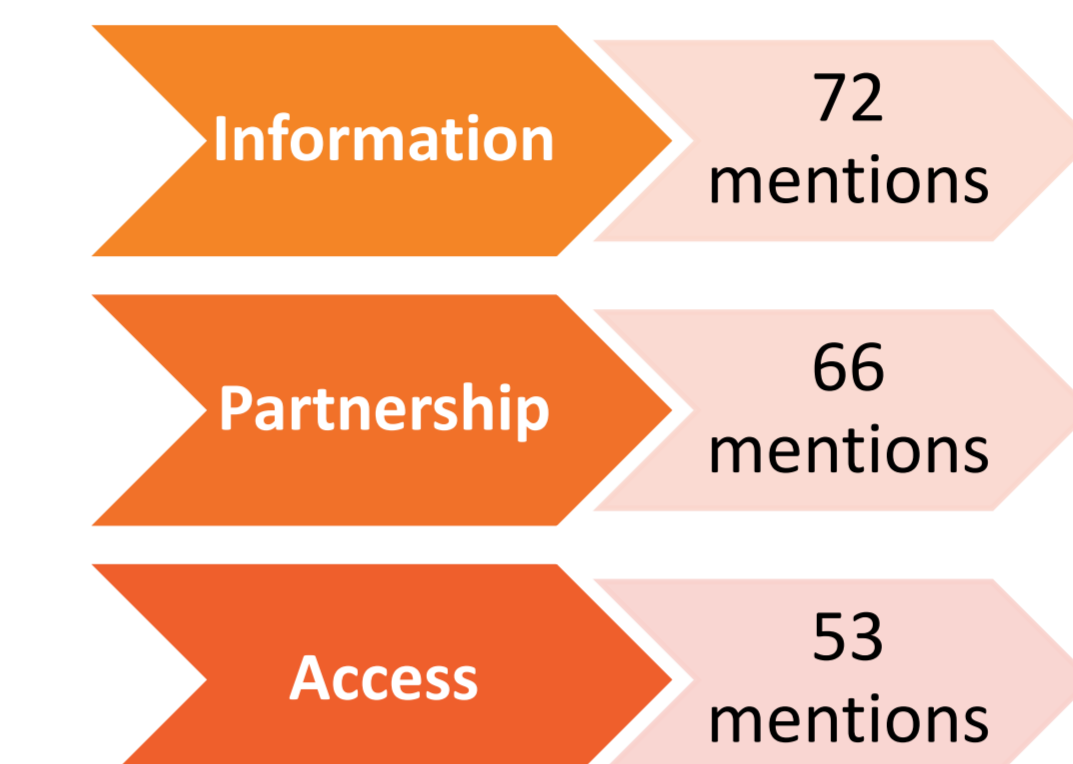


Figure 5. Most common "Australian Charter Healthcare Rights" mentioned in Focus Group

5 of 6 Patients in Focus Group commented that accurate details of remaining prescriptions and repeats would significantly improve medication management

"[Medication management] is 100% the most important thing ... my medication really determines my health."

"I'm probably more anxious about medication 7 years out ... than I was in the beginning"

"I don't know how much [repeats] are left at the pharmacy"

"It would be nice if [medication names] could start to generate or [the OMOF] remembers what yours [medications] are."

"I like the idea of an app that has all the information there"

"I think my [medical] team should be telling me my side effects."

Figure 6. Patient Focus Group quotes

OMOF Improvements and Overall Patient Experience

Table 3. Patients' most requested OMOF improvements

Suggested OMOF Improvement	Mentions in Online Survey	Mentions in Focus Group	Total
1 List of remaining repeats, prescriptions, repeat reminders	50	32	82
2 Login to patient profile, link to patient portal	29	7	36
3 Access medication order history	22	11	33
4 Prefilled data (medication names, patient details)	22	2	24
5 Increased ordering flexibility (specific amounts, additional months' supply)	10	5	15
6 Add notes or comments field to OMOF	9	3	12
7 Dropdown lists (medication names)	6	5	11
8 Scan or upload new prescriptions to OMOF or Alfred Health Patient Portal	10	1	11
TOTAL patient suggestions	158	66	224



93.4% of patients would recommend Alfred Health pharmacy to someone needing Outpatient Pharmacy services

Discussion

- Patients' responses to the Online Survey and Focus Group show that online medication ordering streamlines patient access to the pharmacy, with nearly all patients finding the OMOF easy to use. However, only 49% say it helps them manage their medications; expanding OMOF functionality would alleviate health-related anxiety.
- Service delivery improvements were identified. The following *Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights*⁴ are relevant and important to patients:
 - Access and Respect:** Some patients are unaware of the OMOF; information flyers could increase awareness. Other patients report needing additional support to use the form. Implementation of patient recommendations could address this.
 - Safety:** Online survey responses suggest some patients need additional medication counselling. This could be addressed by offering Extended Medication Consultations through the Outpatient Pharmacy.
 - Partnership and Information:** The most common themes arising from the data. Patients report stress and anxiety when they struggle to manage their medications with the current system. Strategies to improve the OMOF could better support patients. Some improvements are simple additions (e.g., comments section), whereas others require redesign (e.g., inclusion of remaining repeats). Integration with Alfred Health's Cerner Patient Portal, an existing platform that provides patient access to pathology results, clinic appointments and discharge summaries, will require consultation with Information Technology to deliver.
- The remaining *Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights*,⁴ "Privacy" and "Give Feedback" were not prominent discussion points in the data. However, patients appreciated the opportunity to provide feedback, with many interested in joining the focus group.
- The next stage of this project is to assess the feasibility of patient suggestions and to workshop strategies to implement viable ideas into the Outpatient Pharmacy practice.

Conclusion

- Patients are involved and advocate for their medication management. They are also invested in improving Alfred Health Outpatient Pharmacy services.
- The OMOF is useful for patients but optimising its potential will benefit patients and enhance medication management and safety in the future.

References

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