THE EVOLVING ROLE OF THE ONCOLOGY NURSE A CROSS-SECTIONAL SURVEY AMONG ONCOLOGY NURSES IN THE USA

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BACKGROUND

Oncology nurses play a crucial role in the care of cancer patients. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the nurse's role evolved to meet the needs of cancer patients. To date literature explores psychological sequelae and self-care needs, however little is known about the emerging roles of oncology nurses and the added responsibilities adopted since the pandemic.

The aim of this survey was to evaluate the current scope of oncology nursing practice in the United States of America (USA) and to determine how this has evolved.

METHODS

Online survey for **oncology nurses** working in the US from January until June 2024 using the digital platform Qualtrics^{XM}, distributed via email to nurses across professional organizations, networks, and various institutions through social media channels and the Scientific Committee.

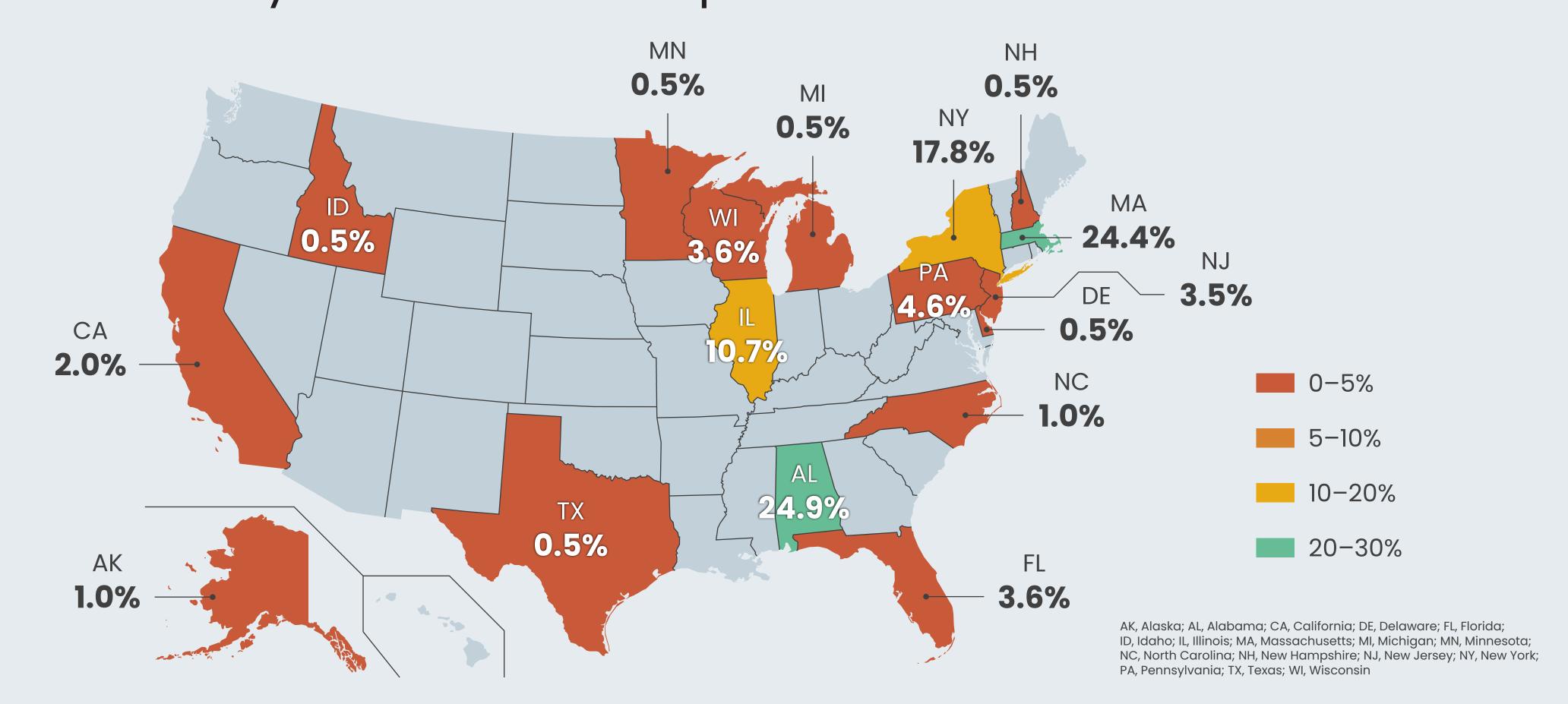
Survey format:

- 1. Demographic information
- 2. Survey: role of oncology nurses in treatment and symptoms management and the evolution of relevant responsibilities over the years
- 3. Open ended questions: challenges and educational needs

Descriptive statistics with categorical variables presented as absolute (N) and relative frequencies(%). Data elements that contained a proportion were subjected to pairwise, two-tailed Z-Test analysis, yielding a p-value.

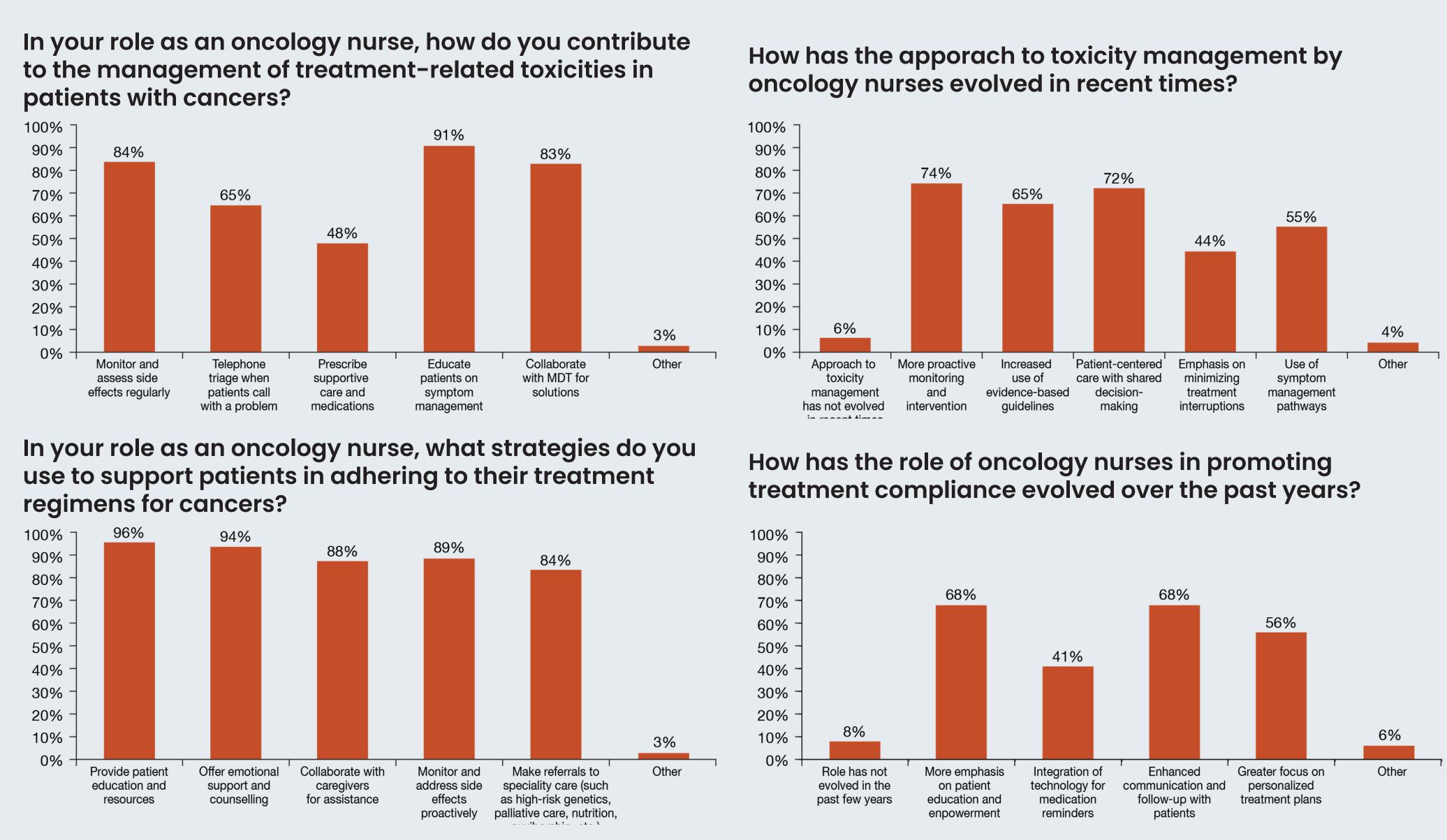
RESULTS

The survey involved 197 respondents from 17 different states.

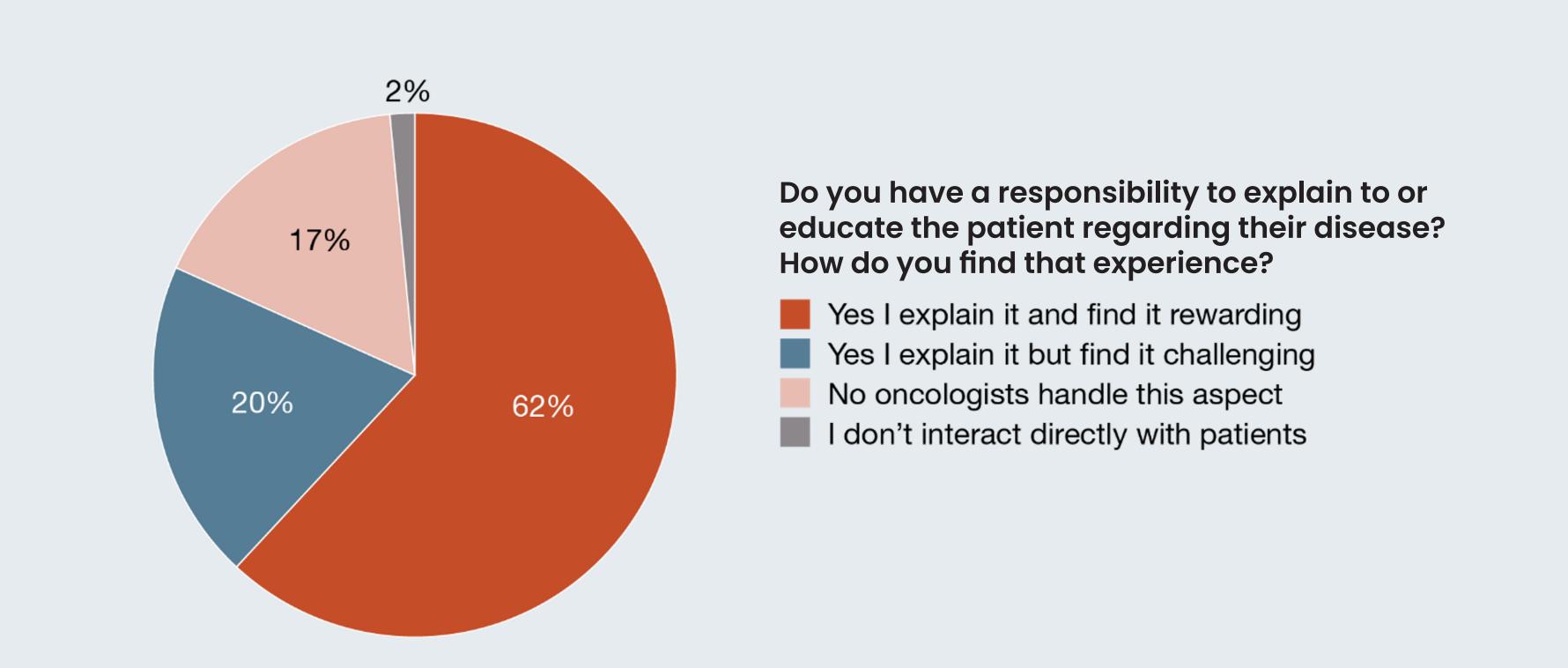


The typical respondent was female (96%), having had over 10 years of nursing experience (34%) and a university Master's or Doctoral degree (combined 53%) and working as an oncology nurse practitioner (23%) or nurse navigator (20%) in the outpatient setting (94%).

Oncology Nurses' Role in Managing Treatment and Its Effects

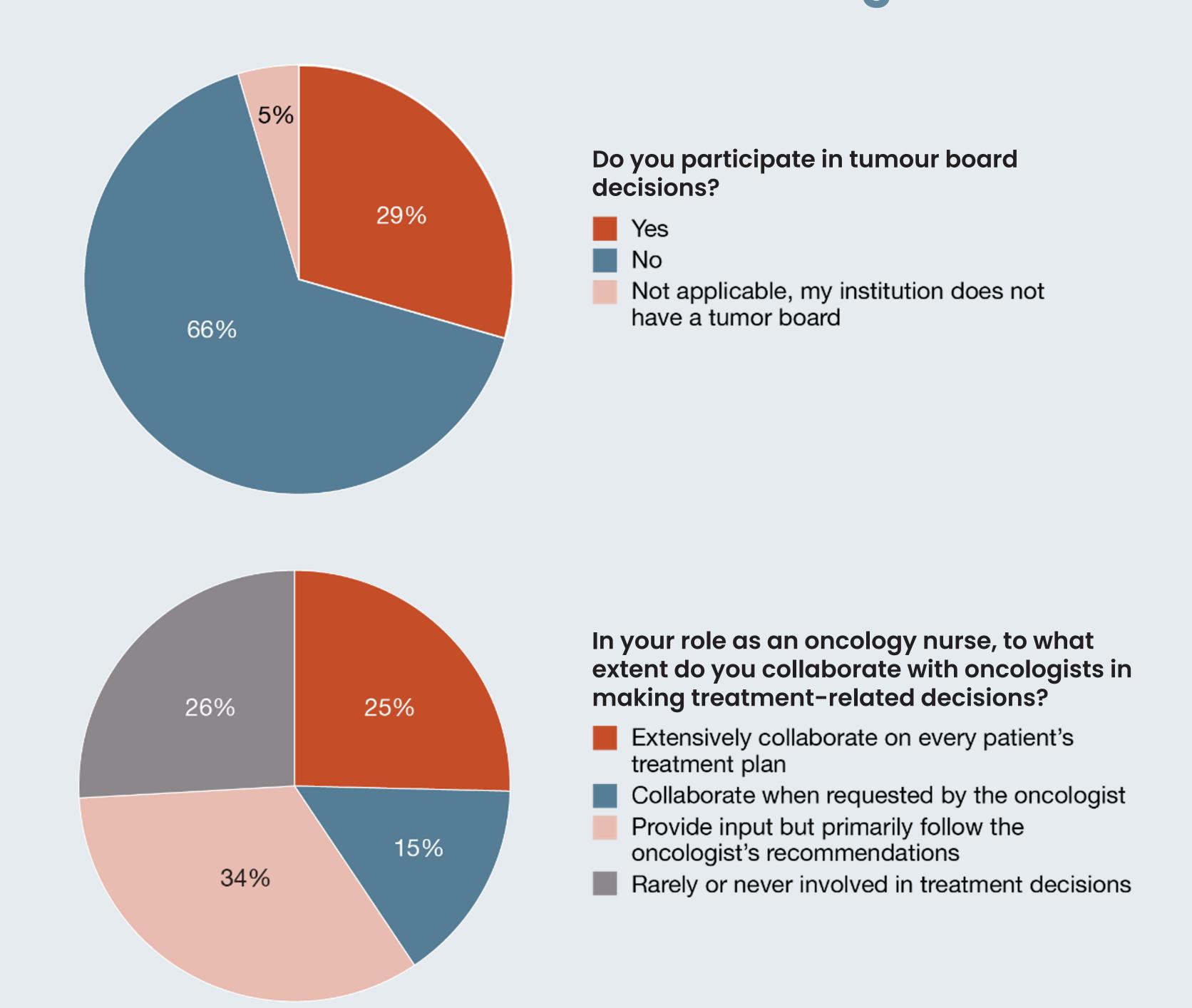


Their role is to educate patients on symptom management and monitor and assess side effects regularly; in this way, they collaborate with multi-disciplinary teams to plan tailored interventions to meet the patient's unique needs.



The highest proportion of those reporting that they have a responsibility to educate patients regarding their disease but find it challenging were registered nurses (32%), followed by infusion nurses (29%).

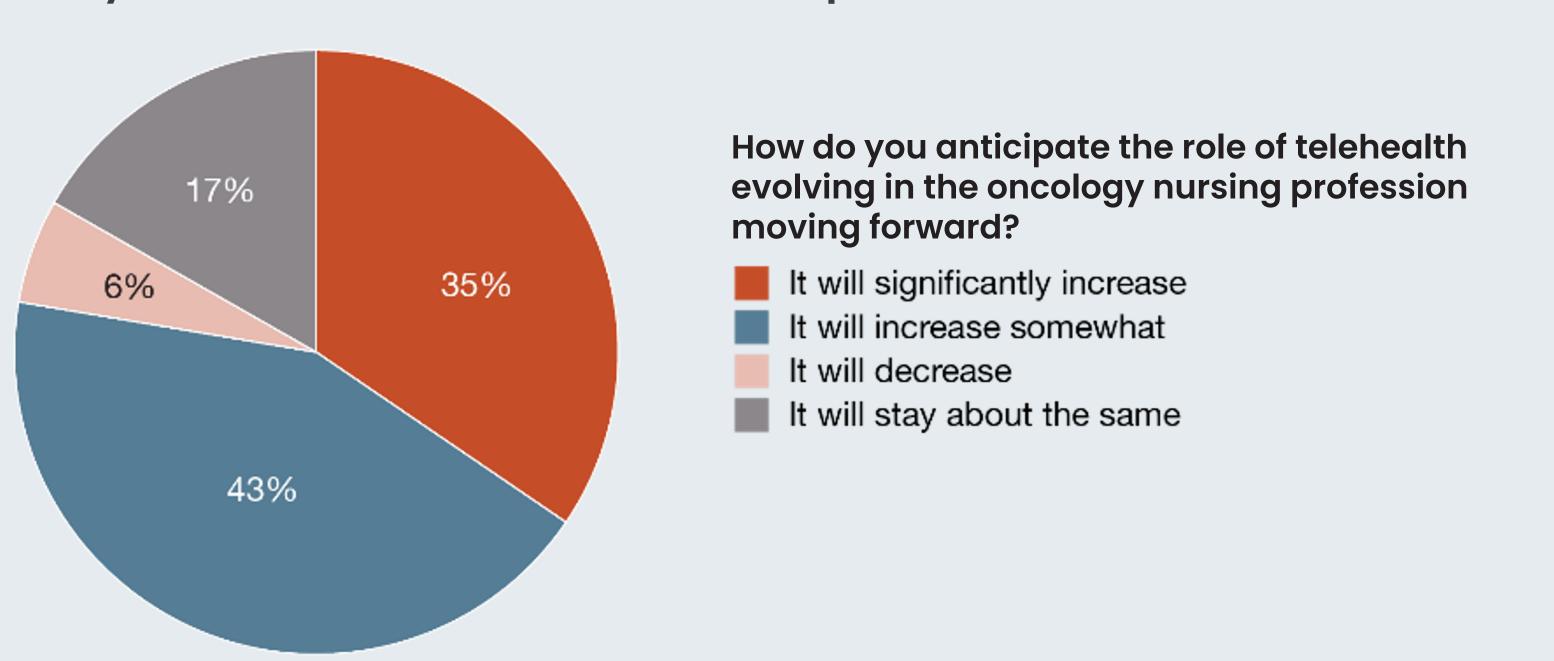
Oncology Nurses' Participation in Treatment Decision-Making



End of life planning: 87% provide emotional support and guidance to patients and families, 65% collaborate with palliative care teams, 52% initiate sensitive conversations about patients' wishes and 43% facilitate and discuss advanced care planning.

Oncology Nurses' Role Post-Pandemic

83% of US oncology nurses feel their workload has increased or significantly increased since the pandemic.



The Future Role of Oncology Nurses

- Increased use of telehealth, virtual clinics and online apps
- Specialized symptom management
- Individualized care (especially via virtual or remote interactions)
- Increased involvement in multidisciplinary teams & more teamwork
- Increased responsibilities, workload and burnout
- Changing practices through introduction of Al tools
 Need for more advanced IT skills or
- Need for more advanced it skills to knowledge
 Need for understanding of new therapies
- The role of genetics and genomics in cancer care
- Need for counseling and communication skills especially concerning patient selfadvocacy, and how to have difficult conversation with patients
- Better education for both patients and nurses

- Evolution in a positive direction:
- "I anticipate that virtual/telehealth remain an active part of our clinic days as a way to continue to increase access to patient care"
- "As AI becomes more available nurses will need to use symptom management pathways fueled by technology"
- "The role of the oncology nurse will include educating the patient not only about their treatment, but how to navigate the health care system to receive the best possible care"
- management and treatment individualized, more prediction of symptoms before they occur. Will be a lot more specialized care"
- "I envision becoming more of an integral part of the team"
- But worries regarding workload remain:
- "The workload and complications are getting harder and harder to deal with – it is nonstop and exhausting"

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study allow for a better understanding of the emergent role of oncology nursing in patient care, symptom management and promoting quality of life. Support and educational needs were highlighted for oncology nurses, potentially having a direct effect on patient care and quality of life.

