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Background:

Existing data from large HIV centres exploring the relationship between HIV services and primary care demonstrate a high level of GP involvement. In 2008 we surveyed the patients attending our HIV service and found that a significant proportion had disclosed their status to their GP¹. Confidentiality was given as the commonest reason in those who had not. In 2011, following concerted efforts to encourage and support patients to disclose their status to their GPs, we repeated the survey with the aim of assessing ongoing barriers to communication with primary care.

Method:

Patients attending our HIV outpatient centre between the end of March and July 2011 were asked to complete a form documenting their consent for communication between the clinic and their GP and to complete a questionnaire detailing their experience of Primary Care services.

Results:

102/120 (85%) questionnaires distributed were completed. 79% of patients gave consent for the clinic to contact their GP (Fig 1.) and 75% stated that their GP was already aware of their HIV status (compared with 76% who stated they had already informed their GP in 2008) (Fig. 2). Of all the patients who completed the questionnaire, 32% had concerns about attending their GP which related to their HIV status. Concerns expressed included confidentiality (39%), lack of GP HIV specialist knowledge (22%) and stigma (13%) (Fig.3).

Fig.1 Consent to write to GP regarding HIV

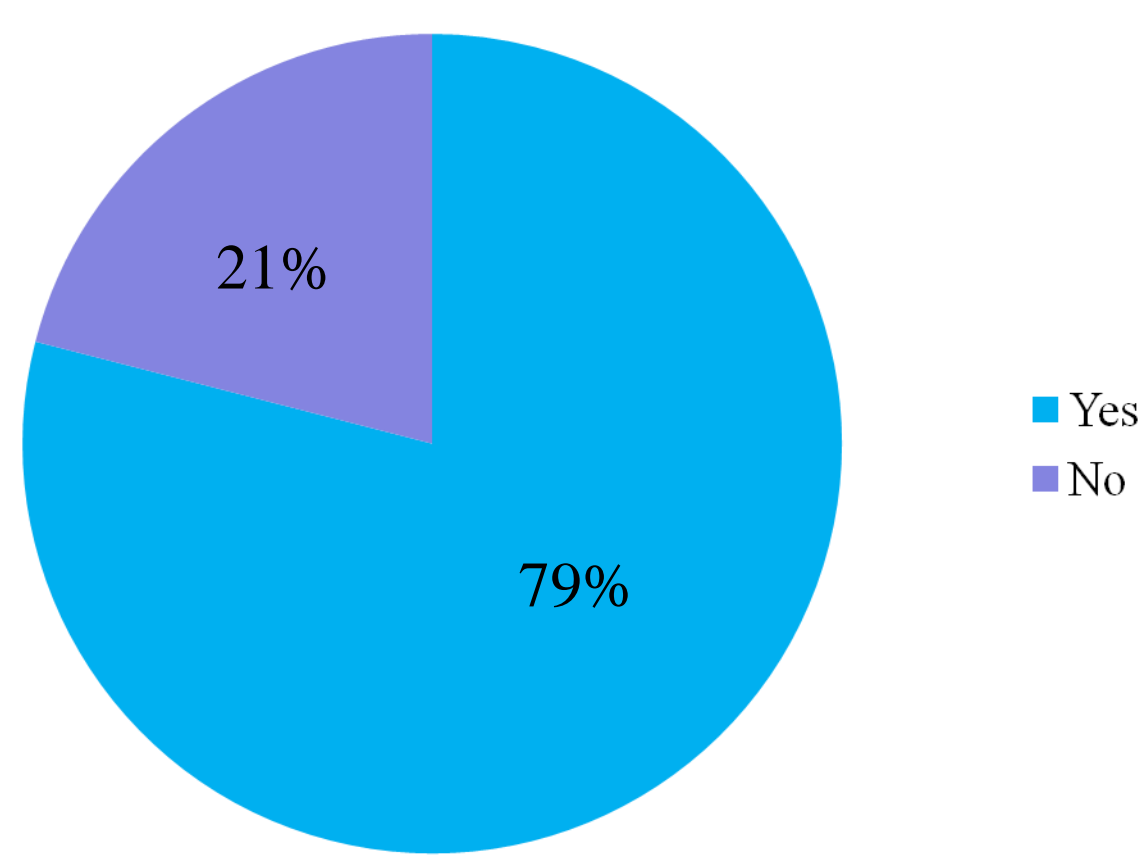


Fig 2. GP already aware of HIV status?

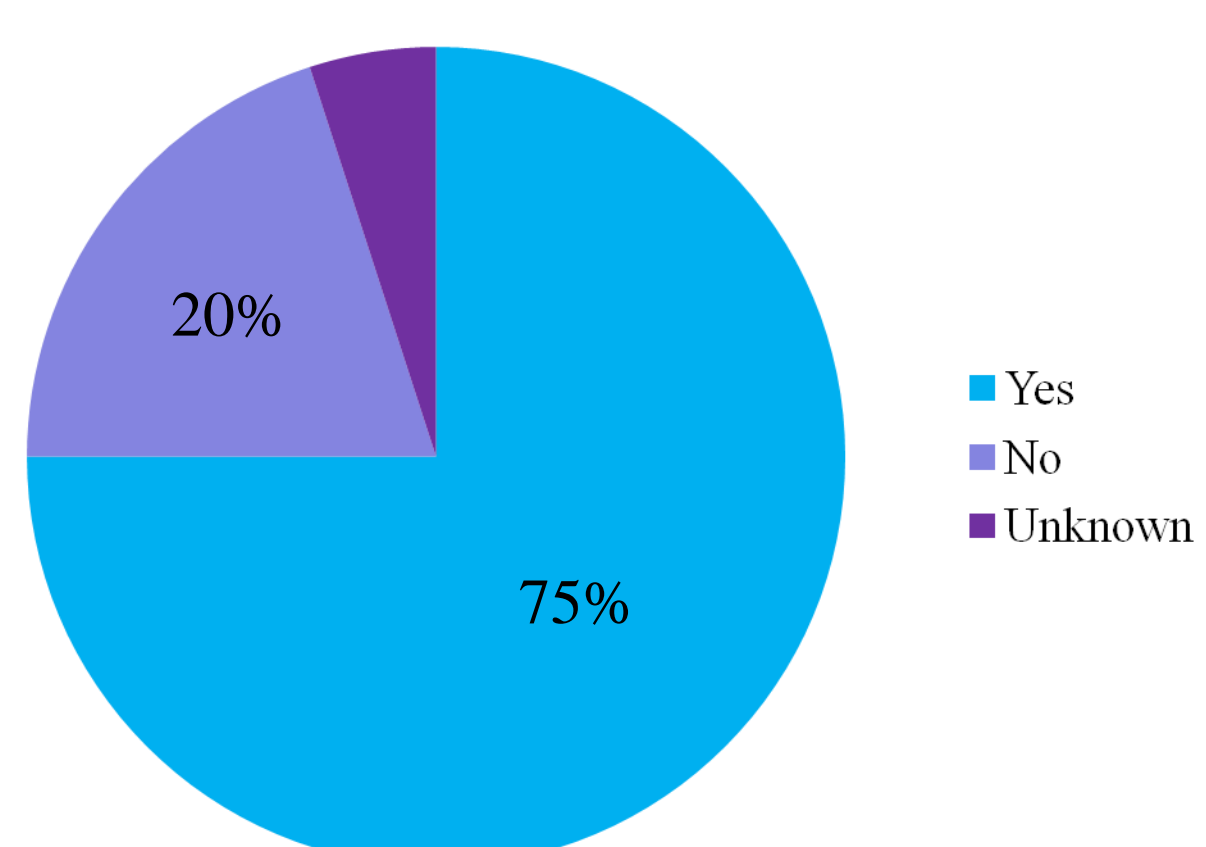
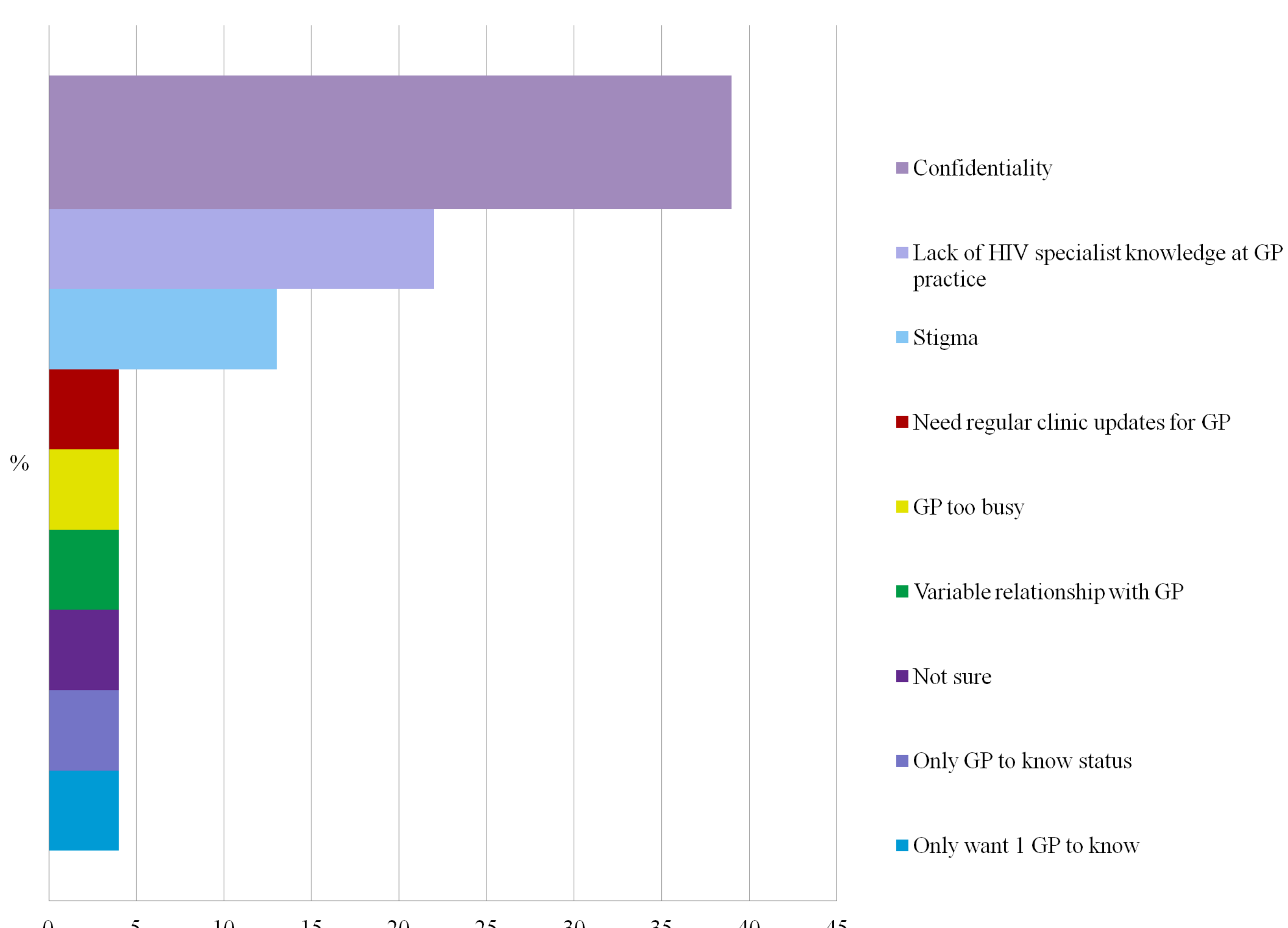


Fig. 4 Patient concerns about attending their GP relating to their status



14% of those who completed the questionnaire were registered with a GP but had not disclosed their status, of whom, 72% gave confidentiality as the main reason for their non-disclosure (compared to 50% stating confidentiality was the main reason they had not disclosed in 2008) (Fig. 4).

22% of those who completed the form stated they would be more confident in disclosing their status if they could be reassured that no one else in the practice beside their GP could access this information about their HIV status; however 10% stated that this would not dispel their concern. Actions suggested by all those completing the survey to alleviate concerns are shown in Fig. 5.

Fig. 4 Reasons given for non-disclosure of HIV status when registered with GP

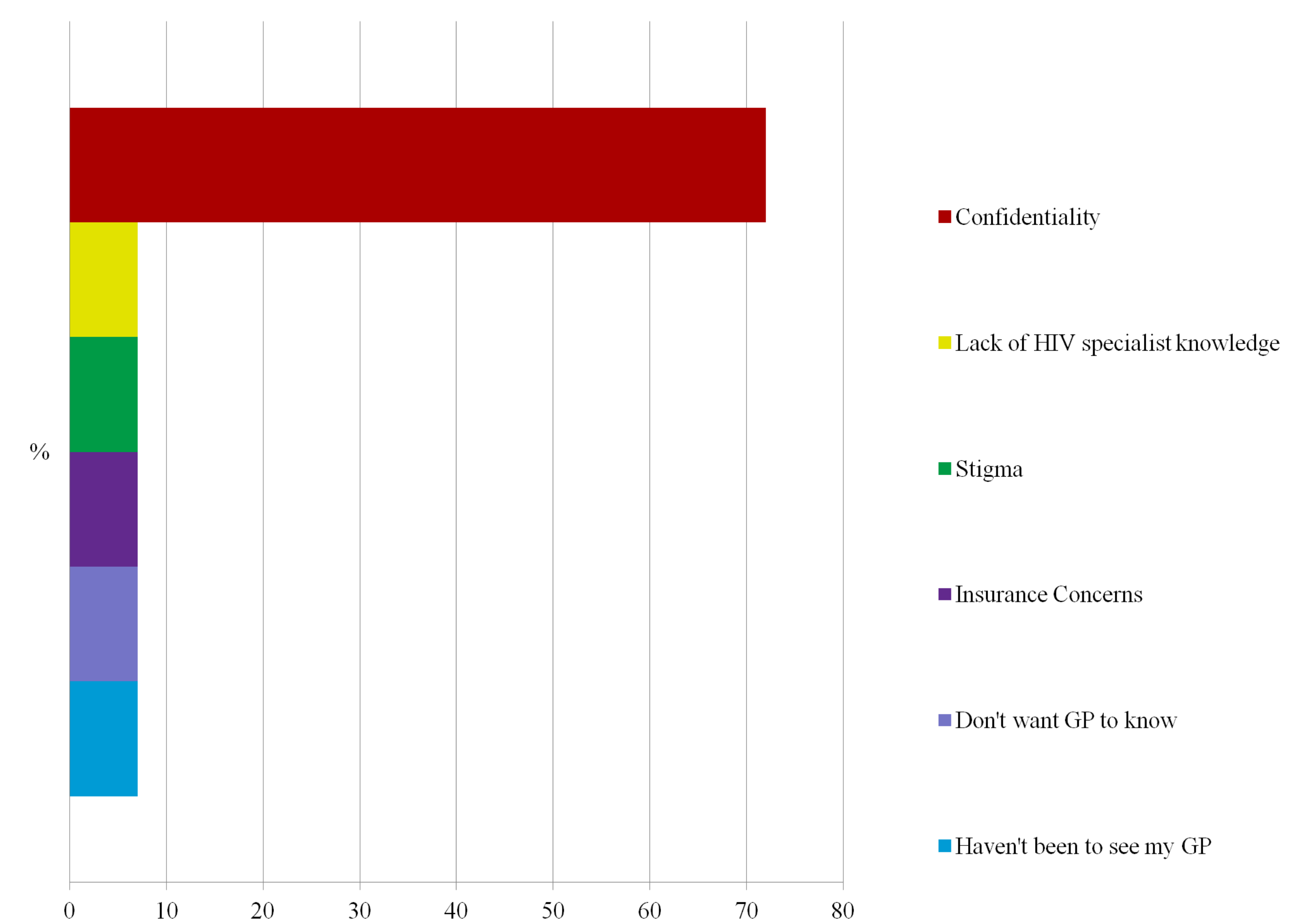
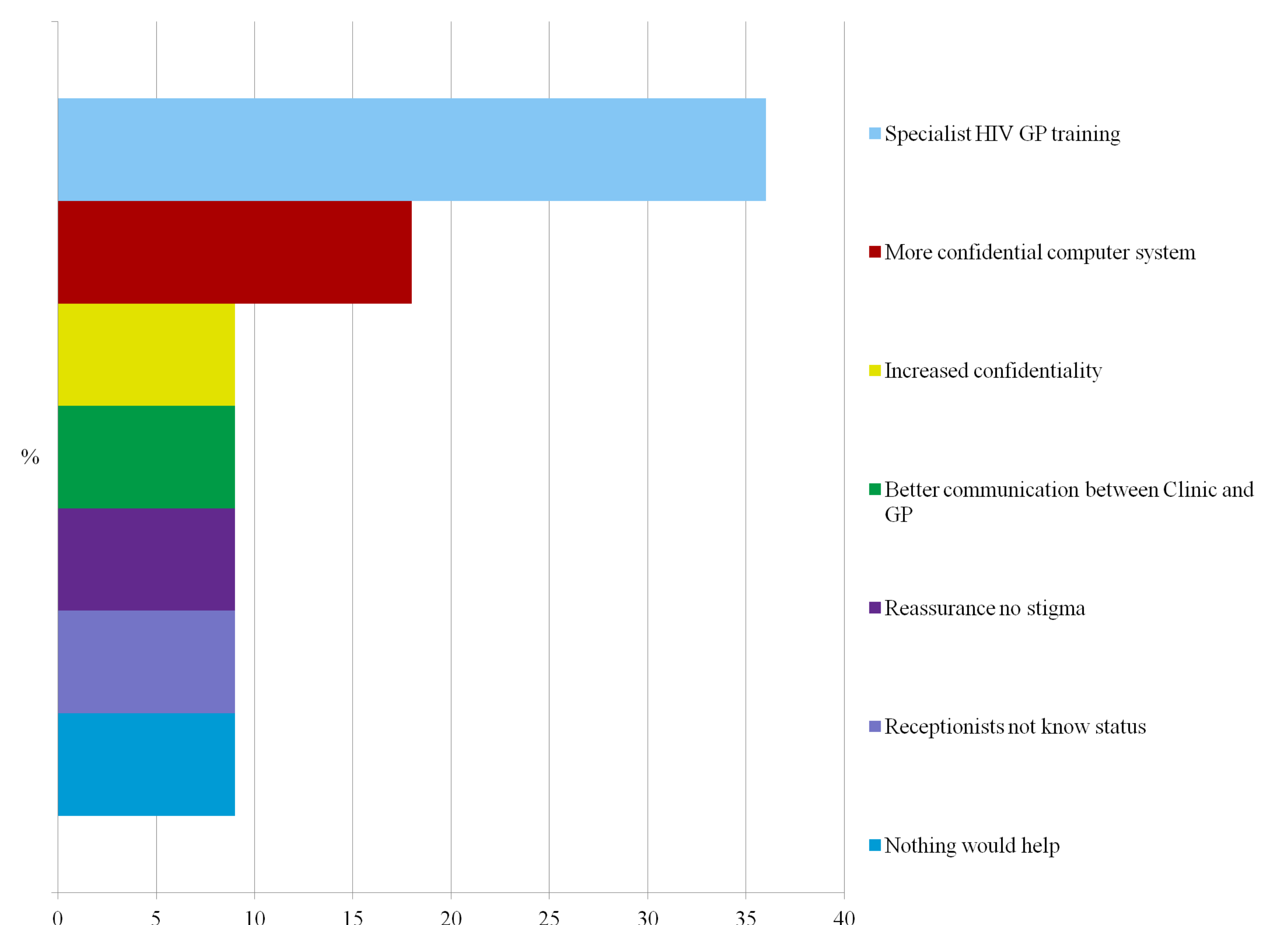


Fig. 5 Suggested actions to alleviate concerns



Conclusion:

This survey confirms that a continued high percentage of our HIV patients' GPs are involved in their care. However, despite concerted efforts, there remains a concerning proportion of patients who are reluctant to disclose their status to their GP and have ongoing concerns relating to confidentiality. Enhanced collaboration between patients, GPs and HIV centres in the form of working groups and patient forums could address these concerns.

References:

1. HIV and General Practice: the experience and concerns of HIV patients in a GUM clinic. C Knapper, H Birley, M Browning 2009. Poster presented BASHH/ISSTD Spring conference, London 2009

Acknowledgments:

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