

Background

Switching from one disease-modifying therapy (DMT) to another is a common experience for people with MS (PwMS), and may be motivated by disease activity, lack of tolerance, insurance coverage, or other factors. Having adequate information about available DMT choices and support throughout the process can help reduce the stress associated with switching and ensure a successful transition to the new DMT. This is particularly important when considering biologic high efficacy DMTs and their eventual biosimilars which is a relatively new phenomenon in the MS space.

Accelerated Cure Project (ACP), a research-focused MS patient advocacy group, and Sandoz jointly identified the need for a better understanding of the DMT switching experience and other aspects of DMT decision-making and MS management. Insights on these topics could help to better inform the development of patient-centered support programs and tools.

Objectives

The main objective of this study was to survey PwMS about their experiences switching and accessing DMTs and assess their needs for information and support during this process.

Other objectives included assessing awareness of specific DMT-related terms and the use of digital apps by PwMS in managing their MS.

Methods

A survey was developed to explore the experience of switching DMTs and the use of patient support programs offered by DMT manufacturers. Questions were also included about awareness of the terms “biosimilar” and “biologic” and the use of digital apps to monitor and manage different aspects of MS.

ACP polled its extensive network of iConquerMS members, consisting primarily of people diagnosed with MS, to assess interest in the survey topic and obtain feedback on the study design. The survey and research plan were also reviewed and approved by the iConquerMS Research Committee and the WCG IRB.

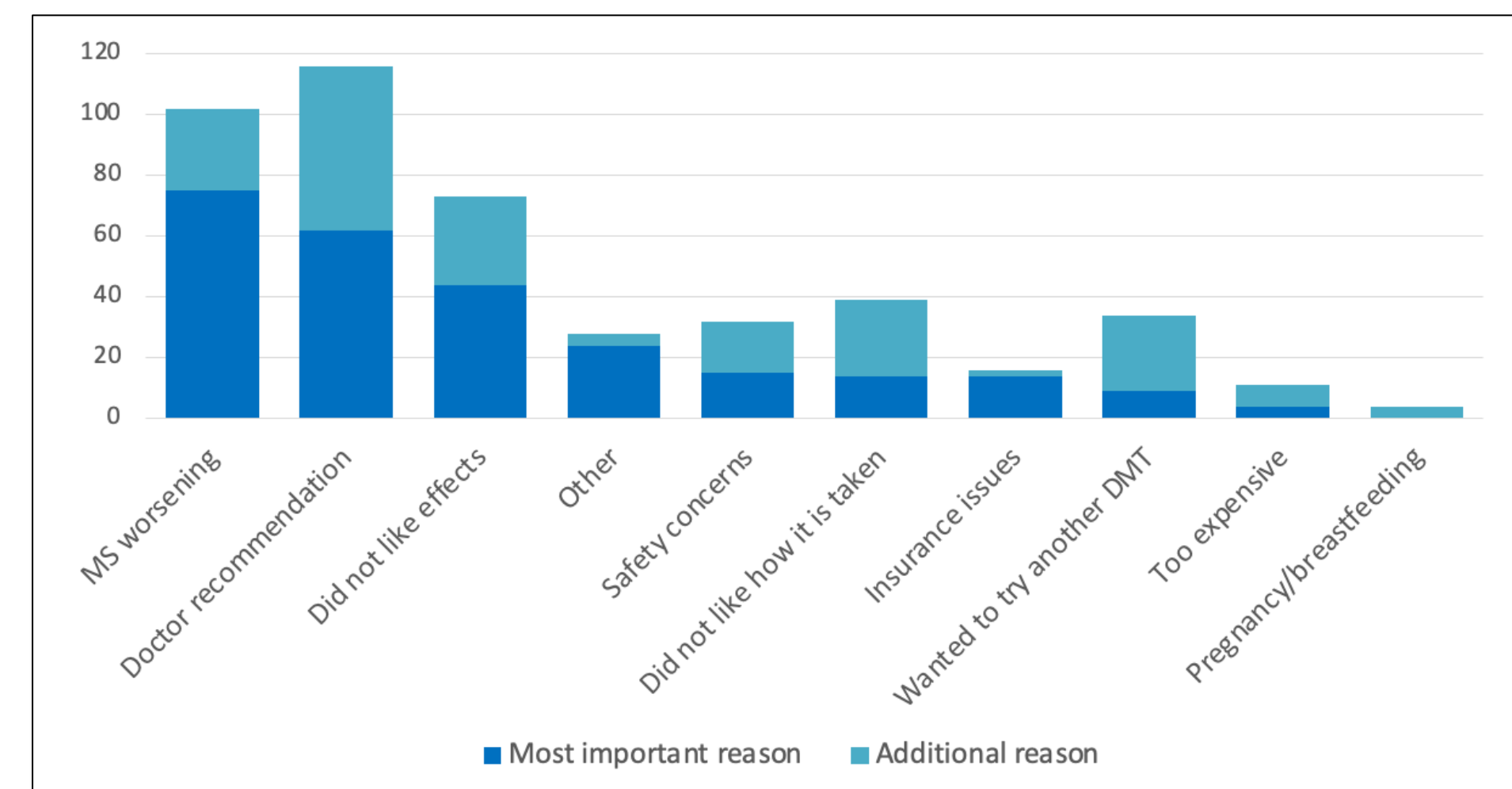
The survey was programmed on the iConquerMS.org web platform and iConquerMS members were invited to participate, with special outreach efforts made to natalizumab users. The survey was made available during April and May 2023.

Results

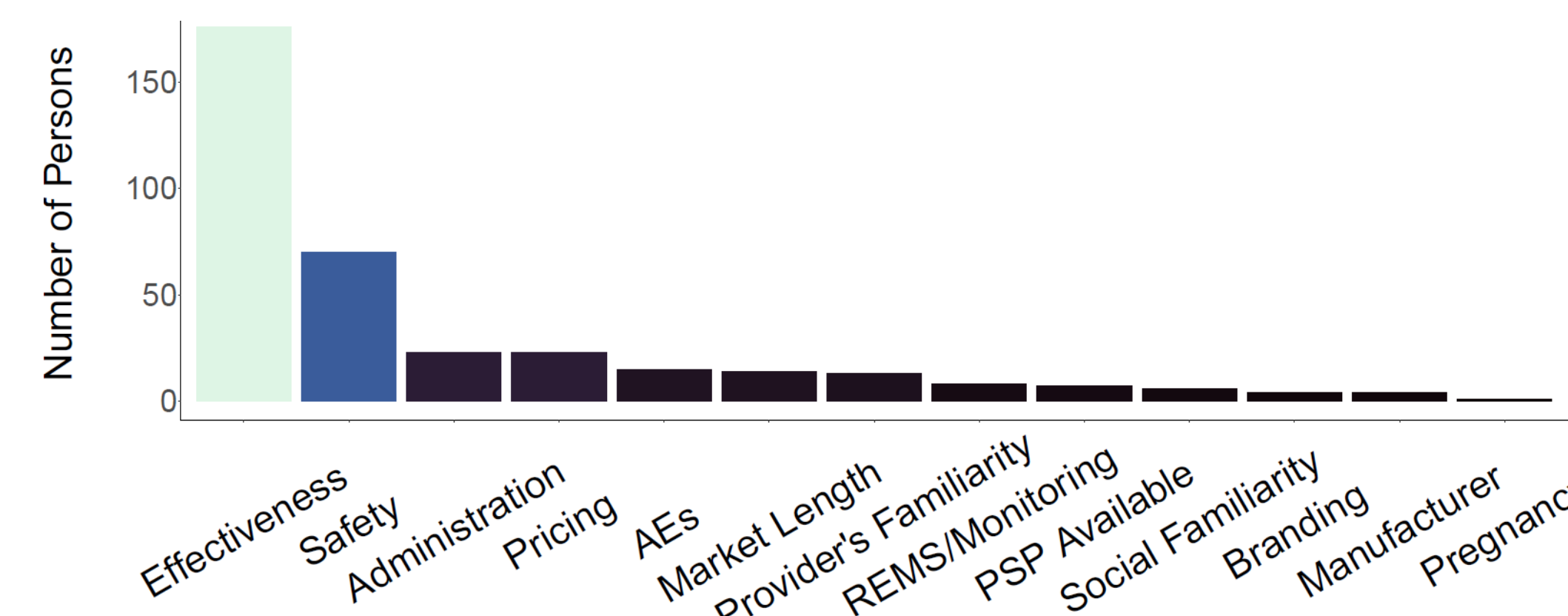
315 PwMS initiated the survey with 303 (96%) completing it. The average age of participants was 54 years and 89% were US residents.

Demographics	N	%	MS Type	N	%
Female	248	79%	RRMS	209	66%
Male	55	17%	SPMS	68	22%
No answer	12	4%	PPMS	28	9%
White	281	90%	Other/unsure	10	3%
Black	18	6%			
Other race/no answer	14	4%			
Hispanic ethnicity	12	4%			

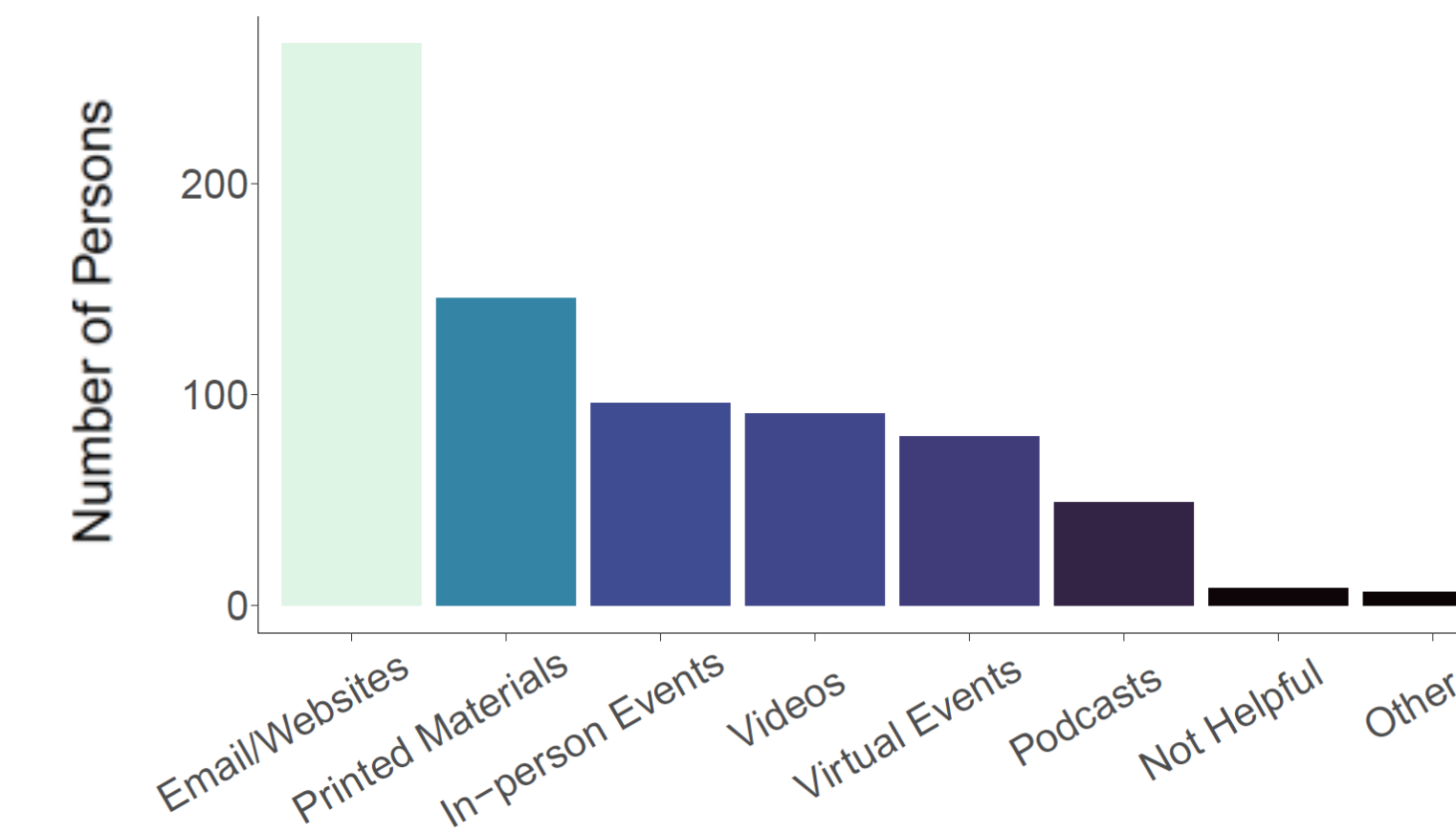
Reasons for Switching DMTs: Most respondents (N=270) were currently using a DMT. A majority (N=225, 71%) indicated that they had switched DMTs at some point in their treatment history, with worsening MS, doctor recommendation, and side effects as the most commonly stated reasons.



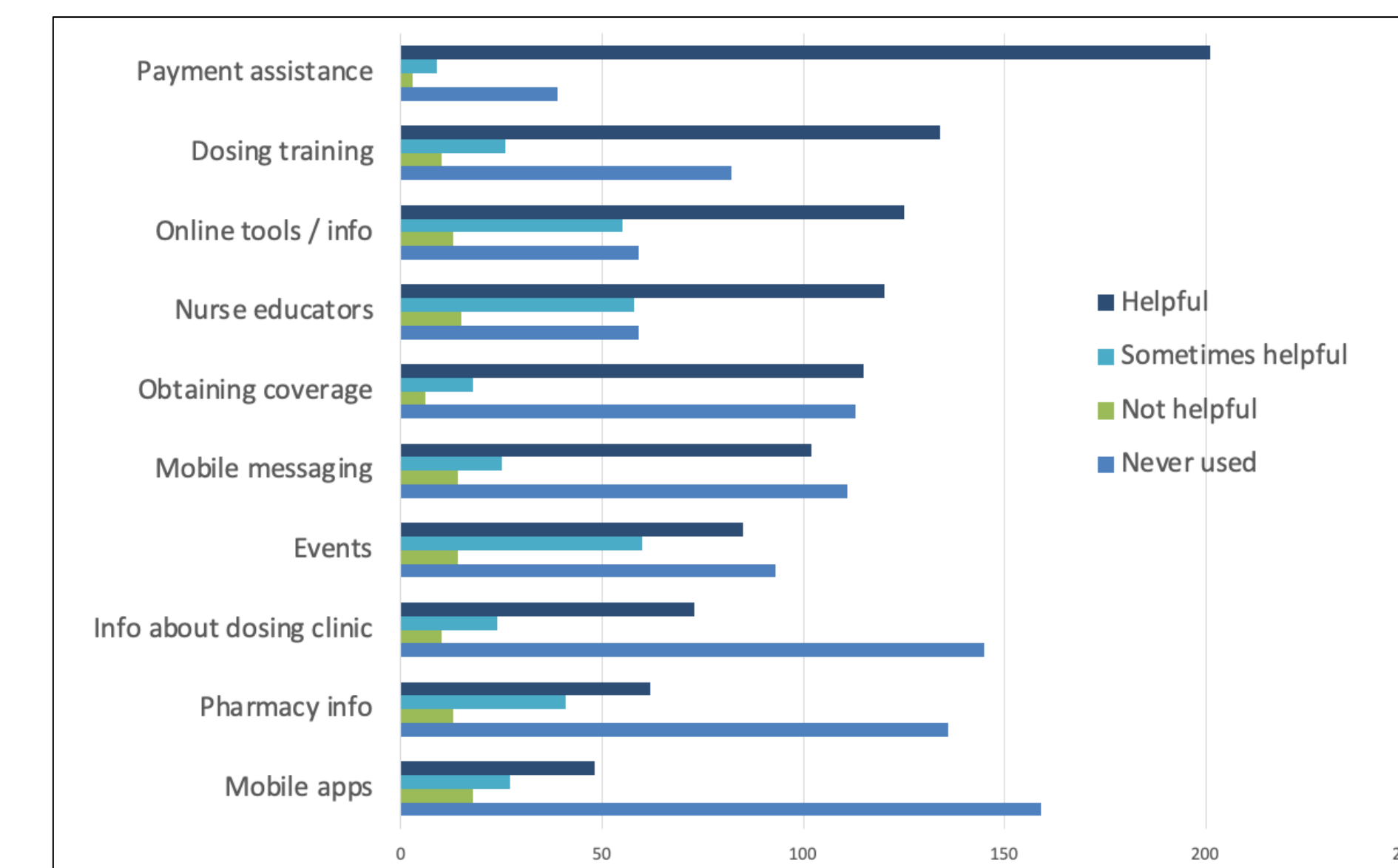
Factors affecting DMT Choice: Most PwMS (N=176, 69%) ranked effectiveness as the top factor affecting their choice of DMT in the event of a switch, with safety, route of administration, and out-of-pocket costs also considered important deciding factors. The majority of respondents (N=139, 62%) indicated that decisions about switching were made jointly by themselves and their provider.



Information Sources: Of PwMS currently on a DMT, nearly all (N=251, 94%) indicated that talking with a healthcare professional would help make them feel comfortable about a switching decision. Emails and websites were the most commonly preferred forms of communication about DMTs.



Patient Support Programs: Most participants (N=254, 82%) had used a patient support program offered by a DMT manufacturer, with payment assistance ranked as the most helpful type of program.



Awareness of Drug Terms: Of PwMS surveyed, 51% had heard the term “biologic” and 43% had heard the term “biosimilar,” but respondents were not always able to define these terms accurately.

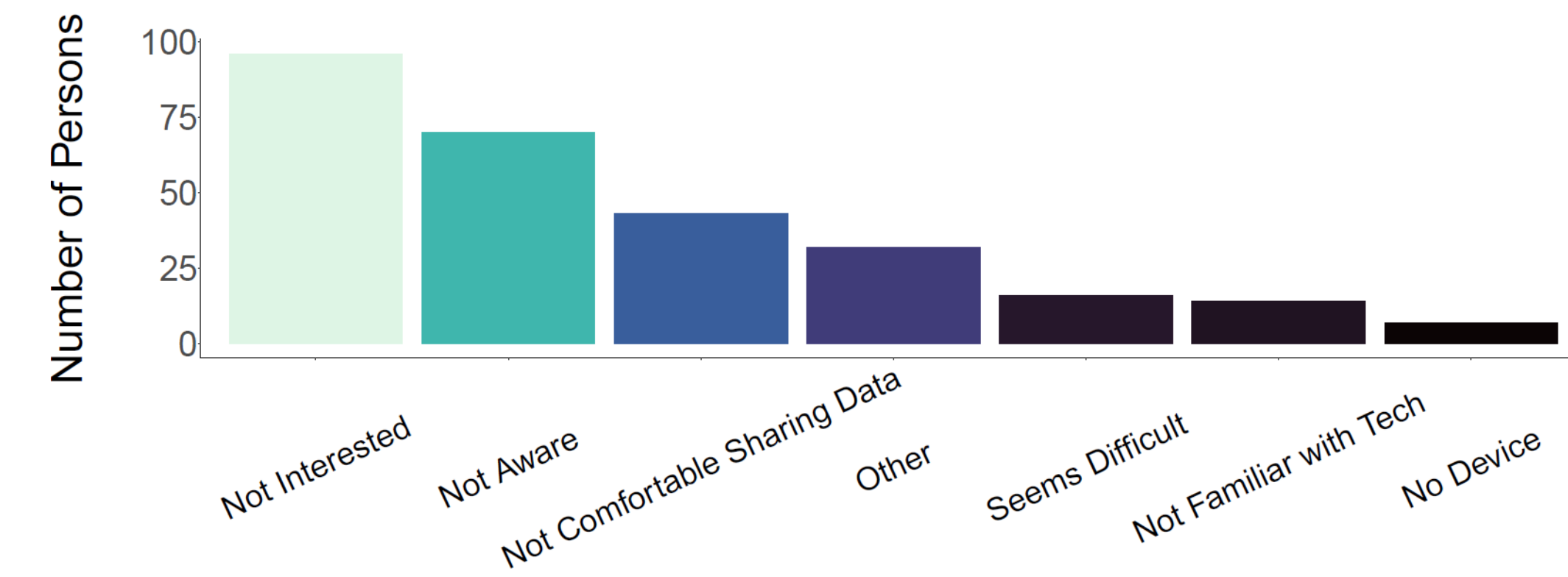
Examples of definitions given by PwMS for “biologic” included:

- “A drug that is made from human cells”
- “Drugs that modify the patient's biology”
- “I think it is made from animal components rather than chemical”

Examples of definitions given by PwMS for “biosimilar” included:

- “Most likely a generic of a name brand drug”
- “A drug developed to be similar to my body”
- “Not naturally existing but “similar to” your body's DNA/RNA”

Use of Digital Tools: Only 26% of respondents (N=80) had ever used digital apps or tools for monitoring their MS. Lack of interest and awareness were the most common reasons for not using these products.



Conclusions

Most participants had experienced a DMT switch at some point in their journey with MS. When considering a switch from one DMT to another, PwMS are primarily concerned about improving effectiveness and minimizing safety issues and side effects.

Healthcare providers and DMT manufacturers should ensure that factual, accessible information on these aspects is available, as well as education about new terms that may be included in DMT materials. According to the survey, PwMS are not largely familiar with biosimilars, and thus may benefit from greater education about this option which has the potential to make traditionally expensive high efficacy DMTs more accessible.

Manufacturer support programs are widely viewed as helpful by PwMS, with payment assistance being regarded as the most helpful type of program. These programs can also play an important role in easing the transition to a new DMT.

Acknowledgements

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Disclosures

S. Marchese, A. Chen and D. Singh are all employees of Sandoz.

For more information

Please contact Shelby Marchese (shelby.marchese@sandoz.com) or Hollie Schmidt (hollie@acceleratedcure.org) for more information.