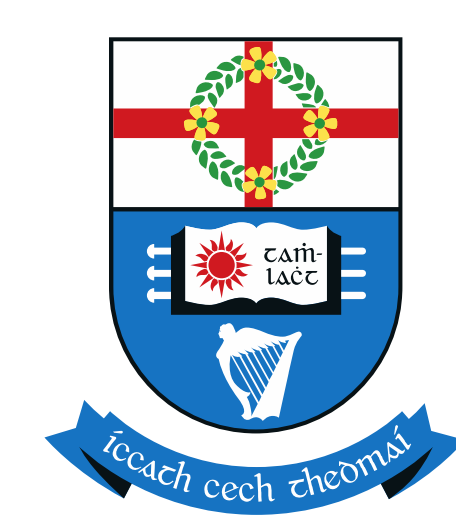


Coeliac Disease Group Education: Confidence Levels With The Gluten Free Diet



Mairéad Keenan, Niamh Redford, Sarah Gill

Coeliac disease (CD) is a chronic inflammatory condition of the small intestine that is triggered by the ingestion of gluten, resulting in the inability to absorb nutrients properly. Gluten is a protein found in wheat, rye and barley¹. There are an estimated 100,000 people living with coeliac disease in Ireland, and an estimated 75% living undiagnosed. The only current treatment for CD consists of a strict adherence to a lifelong gluten-free (GF) diet². Several studies have shown that group education sessions are an effective way to increase patients' knowledge on CD and the GF diet.

Method:

Five coeliac group education sessions were led by a dietitian in Tallaght University Hospital during 2023-2024. A total of 19 patients attended and provided feedback on their knowledge pre and post attending the group. We used both a pre and post questionnaire to measure the patients' knowledge on CD and the GF diet before and after the group education session. We assessed the patients confidence in their knowledge of the GF diet both before and after the session using the following question; "How confident do you feel in your knowledge of the gluten free diet?" and collected the data using a 5 point Likert scale (1= very unconfident, 2=unconfident, 3=neutral, 4=confident, 5=very confident). For the purpose of statistics 1 and 2 were grouped together as 'unconfident' and 4 and 5 were grouped as 'confident'. Further information was collected such as: where the patients received their prior information, if they will change any aspects of the diet post the group session, etc.

Results:

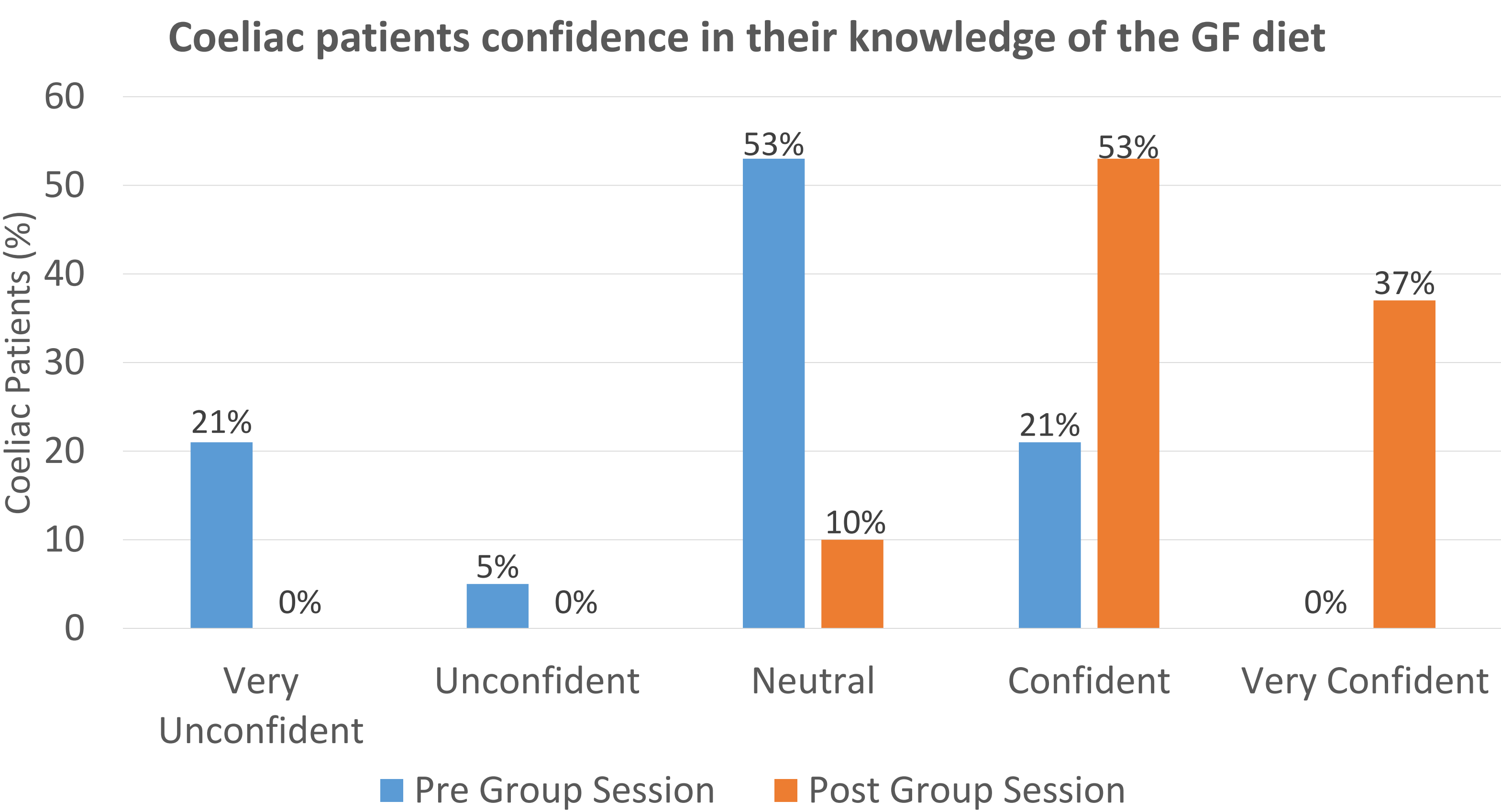


Figure 1: Coeliac patient's confidence in their knowledge of the GF diet before and after the session

The patient cohort that attended the group were 89% female and 11% male and ranged in age from 21-74 years old. McNemar's Test was used to compare self-reported confidence level before and after group education. Post group education there was an increase in patients reporting confidence in their knowledge of the diet from 4 (21%) to 17 (89.5%) and a decrease in patients who were not confident from 5 (26.3%) to 0. No patients reported a decrease in confidence score and 16 patients (84.2%) reported an increase, as seen in Figure 1. This was found to be statistically significant ($p=0.003$). Results report that 58% of patients received advice on the gluten free diet from a Doctor, 5% received advice from a dietitian and 37% of patients did not receive advice from any healthcare professional as seen in Figure 2.

GF diet education sources

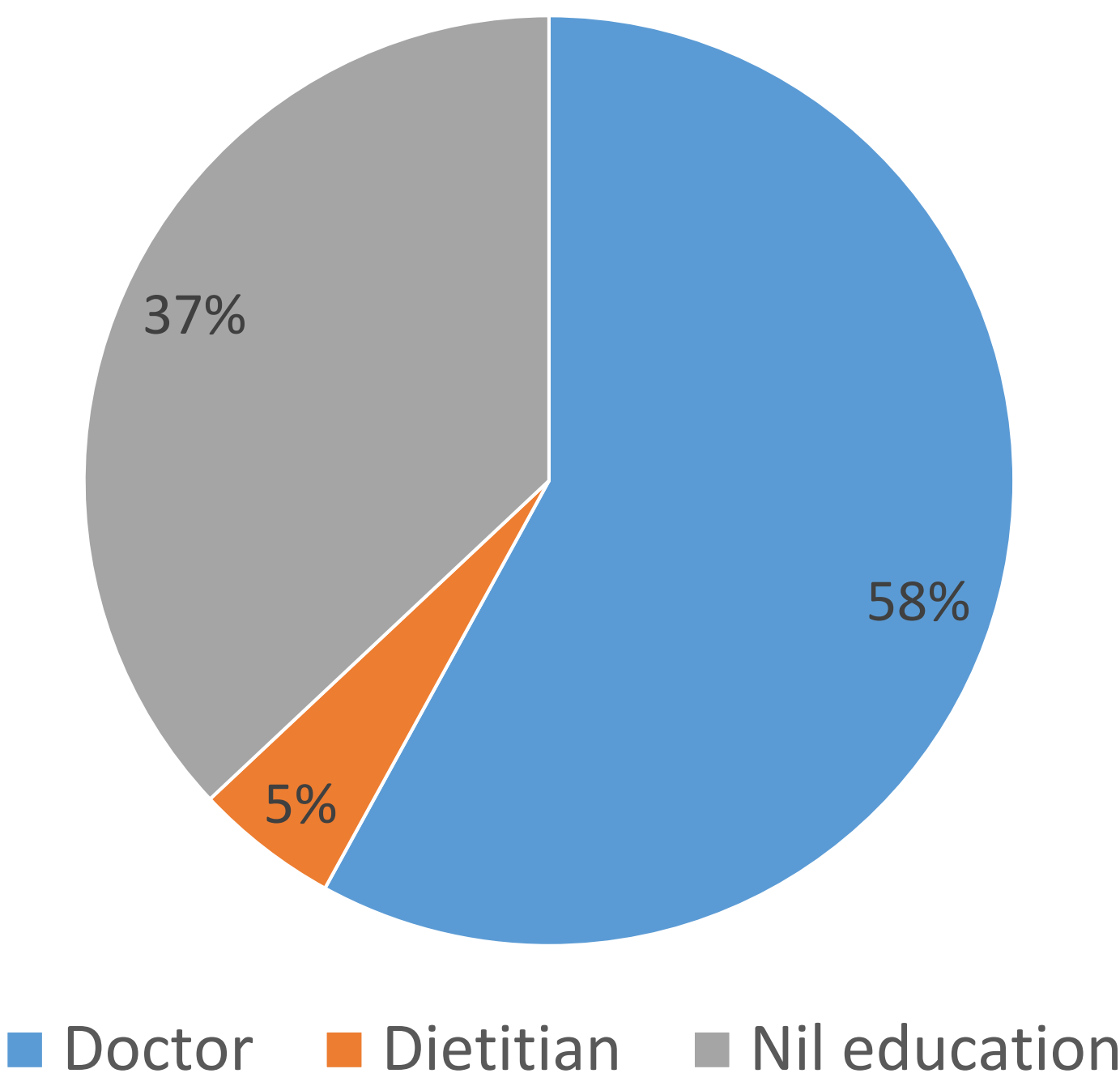


Figure 2: On diagnosis, which healthcare professional advised the patient on a GF diet?

Discussion:

As the only treatment for CD is a strict lifelong compliance with the GF diet, access to education on the condition and the diet is of utmost importance to these patients. 37% of our cohort who did not receive information from a healthcare professional are at risk of common issues such as vitamin deficiencies or cross contamination as they are likely receiving their information from non-reputable sources. With ongoing high waiting list numbers to avail of healthcare professionals, group sessions can help decrease the staff and clinic time needed to educate this patient group. CD group education specifically, has been shown to improve adherence to the diet for patients³. A number of studies have shown that group-based education sessions are an effective way to increase compliance. The decrease from 26% feeling unconfident to 0% post the GF education session is a valuable figure to mark the success of the groups. The increase of confident patients from 21% to 90%, also highlights how the patients gained further insight into their condition and treatment.

Conclusion:

It is clear from carrying out this audit on patient's knowledge pre and post the group education session, there may be patients who are being lost to follow up in the community and are not receiving the appropriate advice required. The success of the results in the area of their confidence increasing specifically, also allows us to see that this is a useful method to provide the information in a timely fashion and prevent patients from waiting to see a dietitian on a one to one basis. Automatic referral to the dietitian to avail of the group session is recommended on new diagnosis or if there are any concerns with compliance with the GF diet.

References:

1. Caio G, Volta U, Sapone A, Leffler DA, De Giorgio R, Catassi C, Fasano A. Coeliac disease: a comprehensive current review. BMC Med. 2019
2. D'heedene M, Vanuytsel T, Wauters L. Coeliac disease: Hope for new treatments beyond a gluten-free diet. Clin Nutr. 2024
3. Akbari Namvar Z, Mahdavi R, Shirmohammadi M, Nikniaz Z. The Effect of Group-Based Education on Knowledge and Adherence to a Gluten-Free Diet in Patients with Celiac Disease: Randomized Controlled Clinical Trial. Int J Behav Med. 2021