

Tracking Shifts in Medical Information-Seeking Patterns Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

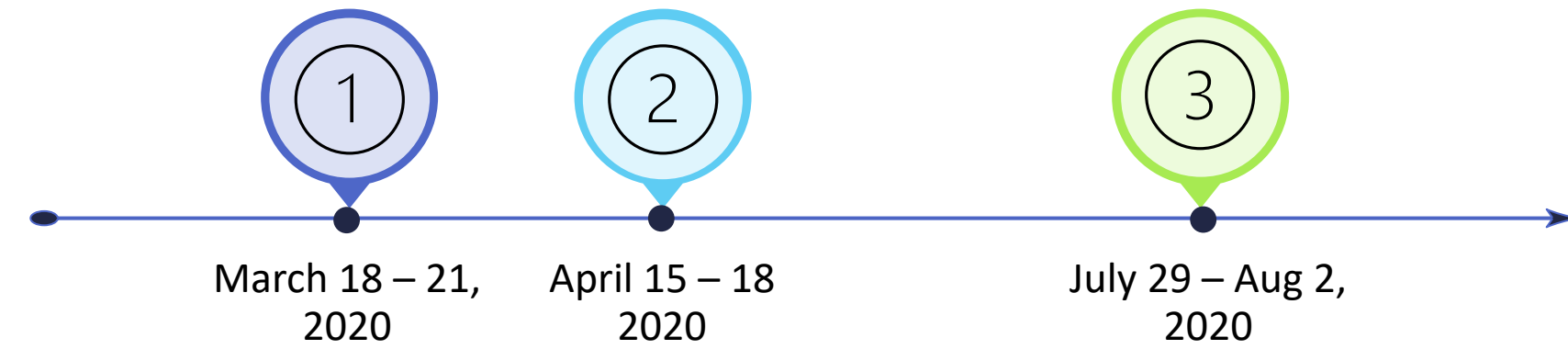
Authors: Wendy Cerenzia and Greg Salinas, PhD

Introduction and Purpose

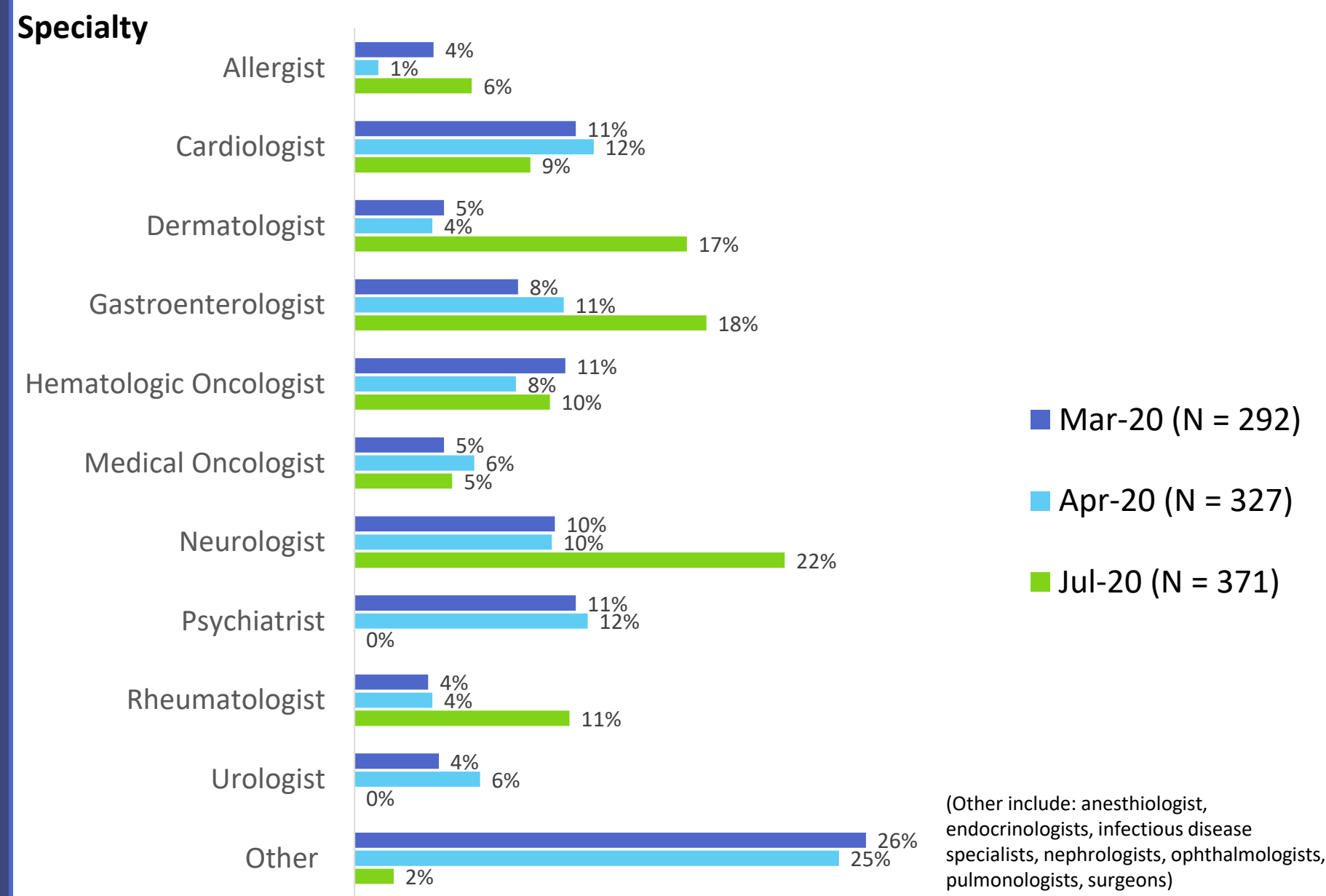
General patterns of medical information-seeking among US specialists have shifted little in the past decade, however, since the outbreak of COVID-19 made in-person medical education impossible, physicians have been forced to seek information in different formats. CE Outcomes conducted surveys at three timepoints to understand the shifting perspectives among specialists related to obtaining medical information and impact of COVID-19 on staying up-to-date.

Methodology

A survey was developed to assess the impact of COVID-19 on medical information-seeking patterns and CME engagement. The survey was fielded by email to US practicing specialists at three timepoints.



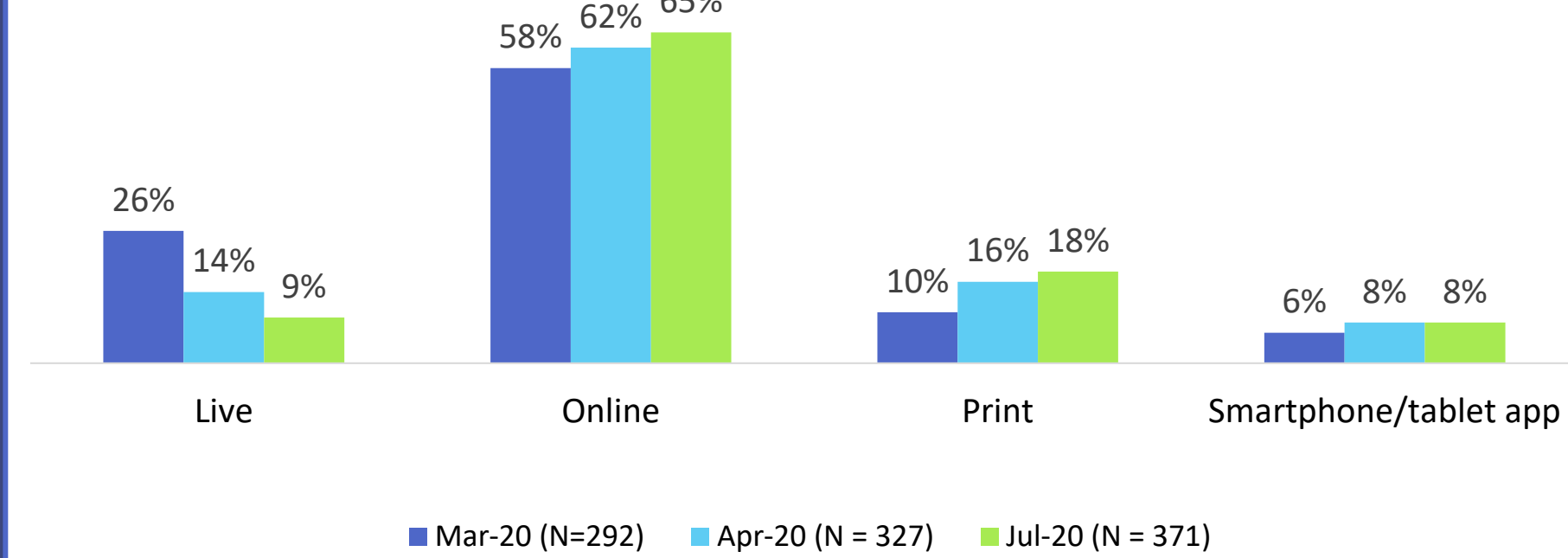
Respondent Demographics



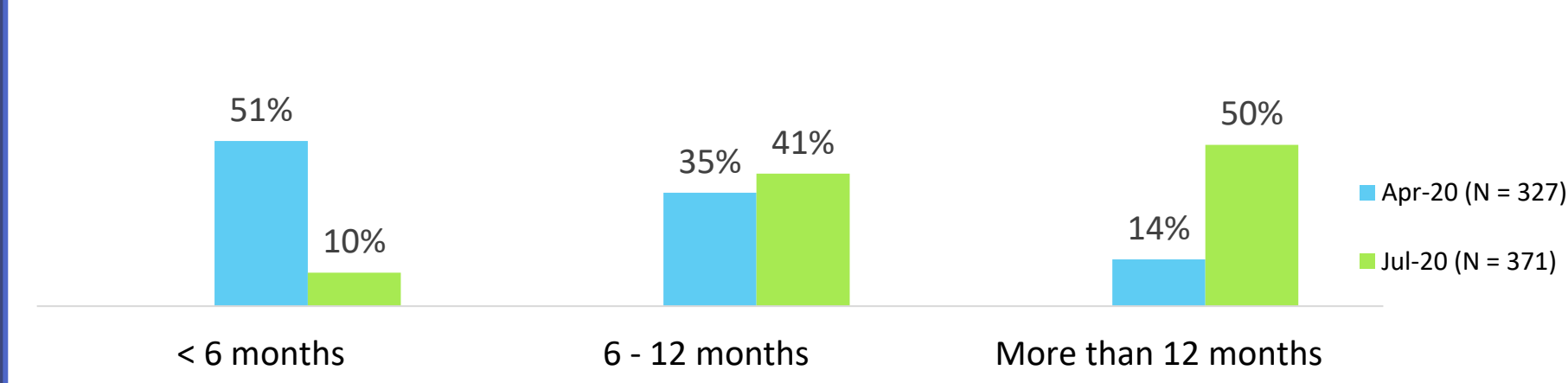
	March 2020 (N = 292)	April 2020 (N = 327)	July 2020 (N = 371)
% in academic practice setting	27%	21%	23%

Expectations of Live CME

For the coming year, what would be your estimate for the percentage of CME obtained by format?



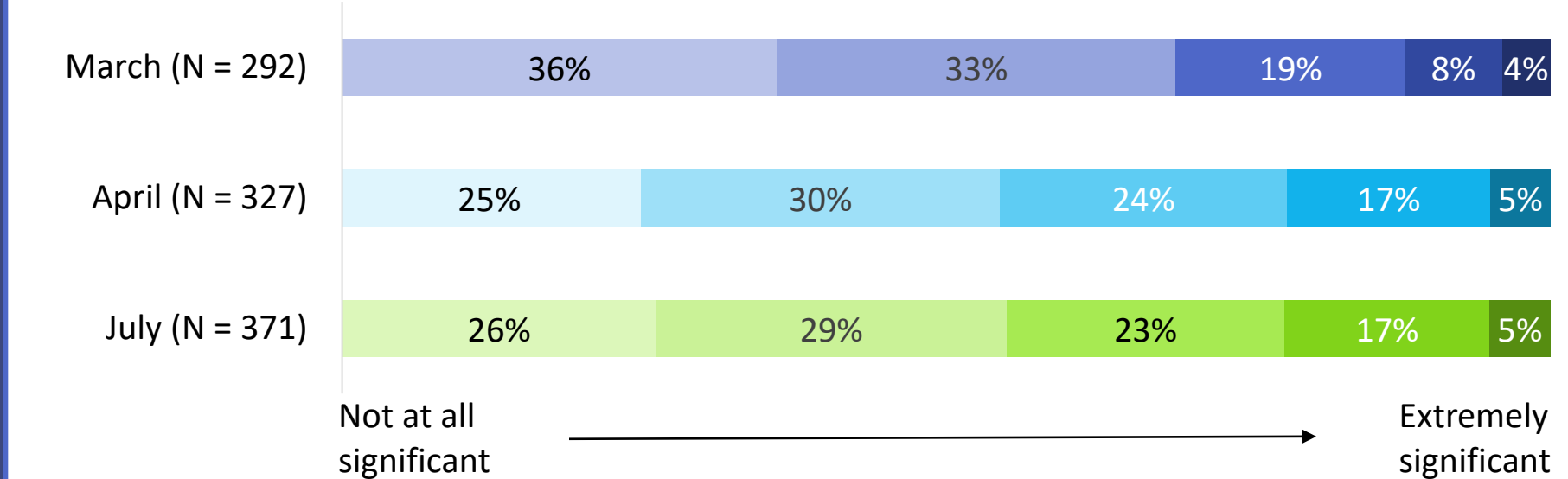
How long do you anticipate needing to avoid live medical meetings and conferences due to COVID-19?



Anticipated participation in live CME over the coming year continues to diminish. In March, specialists anticipated an average of 26% of their CME credits would come from live activities in the coming year, by July specialists anticipated only 9% of the credits would come from live activities. Additionally, in April, only 14% expected to have to avoid live meetings for another 12 months, by July 50% expected at least 12 more months before returning live meeting attendance.

Impact of COVID-19 on Staying Up-to-date

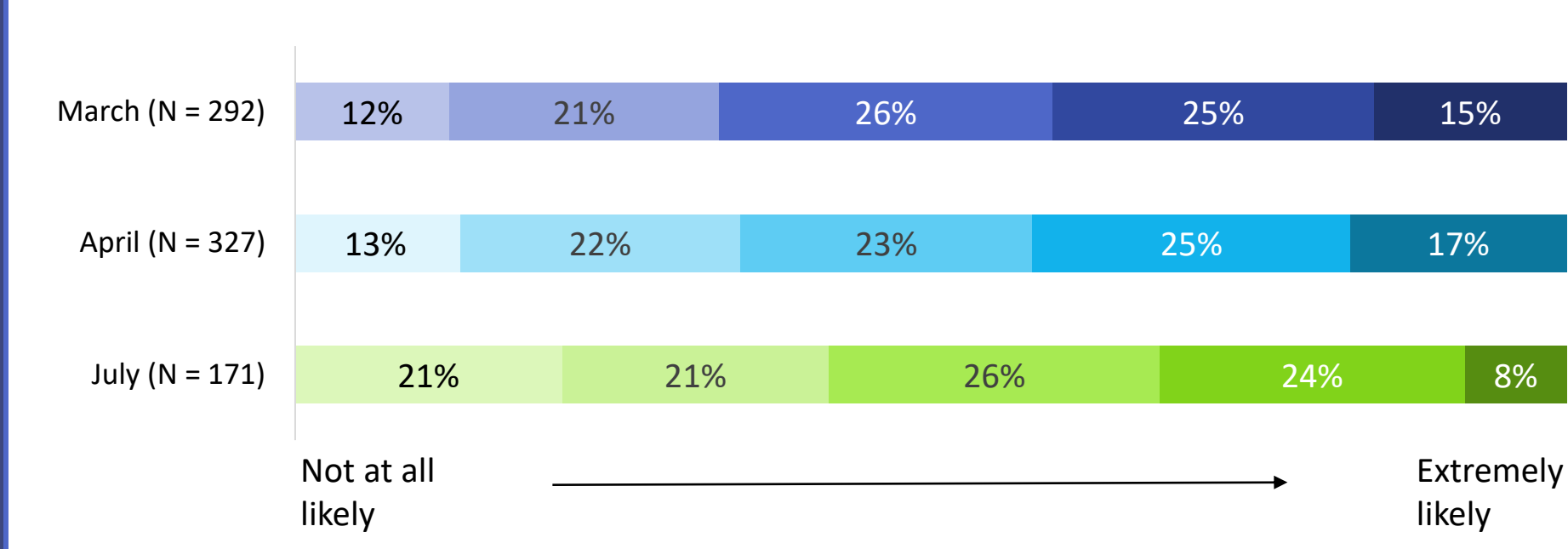
How significant of an impact will COVID-19 have on your ability to stay up-to-date on the latest clinical information in your specialty area?



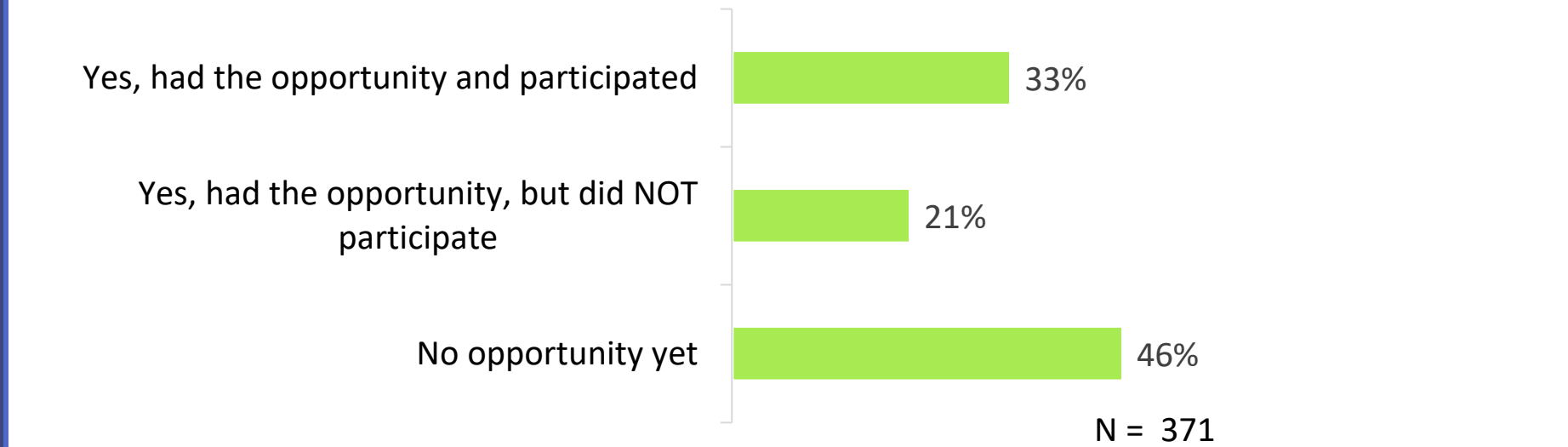
In March, only 1/3 of specialists perceived that the impact of COVID-19 on their ability to stay-up-to-date with the latest clinical information would be moderately, very or extremely significant. However by April, 46% of specialists perceived COVID-19 will impact their ability to stay up-to-date. This stayed consistent with perceptions among specialists surveyed in July.

Virtual National/International Meetings

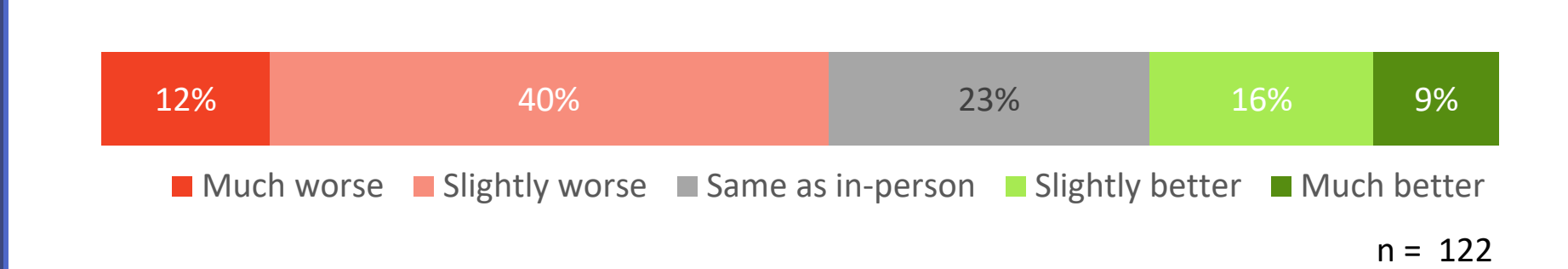
How likely are you to participate in a national or international meeting presented as online content?



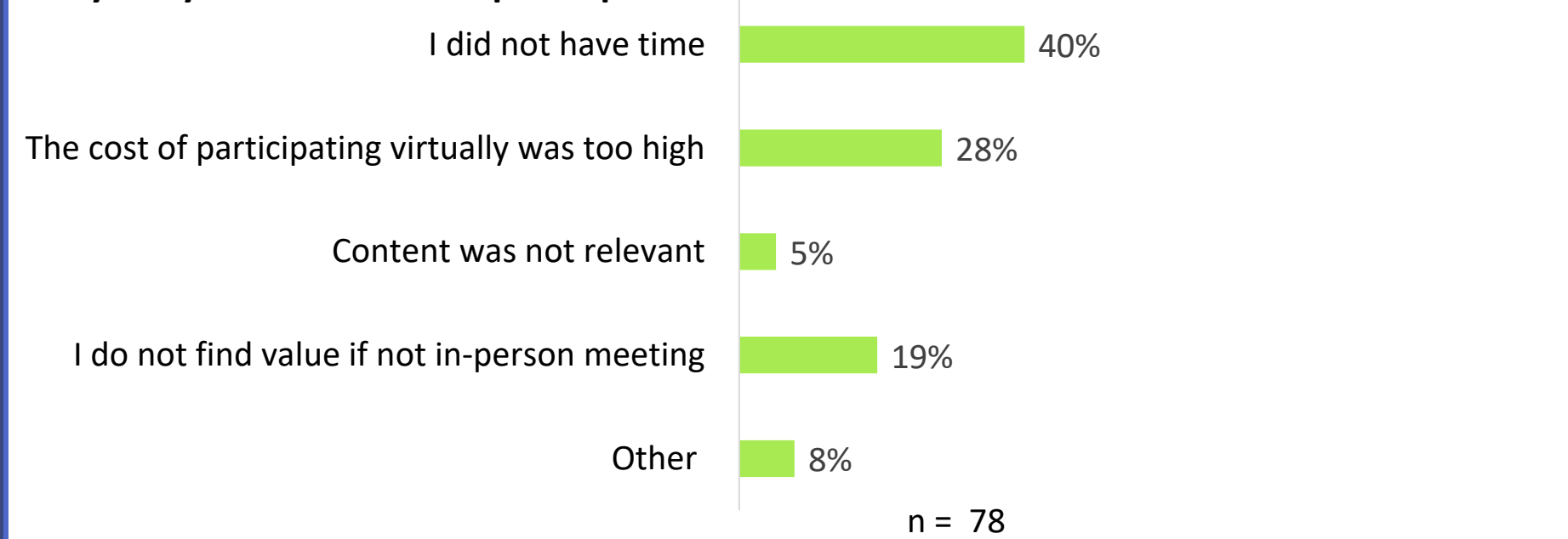
Have you had the opportunity yet to participate in a national or international meeting presented as online content?



Compared to live versions of these meetings, how would you rate the online version?



Why did you choose not to participate?



Likelihood to participate in a national or international conference presented virtually has declined. As of July, 1/3 of respondents had participated in a national or international conference presented virtually, with 25% rating the online version slightly or much better and 52% rating it slightly or much worse. Of those who chose not to participate, lack of time and high cost were the reasons most chose not to participate.

Participation on CME on COVID-19

Since March 1st, have participated in CME on...



Topics for future COVID-19 education (open-ended response from July)

1. Latest treatment/management of COVID-19
2. Updates on a vaccine
3. Effect of COVID-19 on underlying conditions/long-term implications (specialty specific)
4. Testing/screening for COVID-19

By July, 1/2 of specialists had participated in CME on the topic of COVID-19 while 82% had participated in CME on other topics demonstrating opportunity for further engagement on CME on COVID-19. When asked about topics for inclusion in future CME on COVID-19, specialists are looking for updated information on treatments and potential vaccines as well as targeted issues impacting their specialty including impacts of COVID-19 on underlying conditions.

Conclusions

As the impacts of COVID-19 extend further out in time, so do the possibilities for gathering for in-person meetings and exchanges of information. This study shows that US specialists have continued to adapt their approaches to seeking medical information, shifting away from live settings to other formats. The anticipated timeline that specialists expect to return to in-person meetings has extended with 50% of those surveyed in July expecting to not participate in live meetings for at least another year. As national meetings have been moved into online formats, over 1/3 of specialists report they are not at all or only slightly likely to participate in a virtual national or international conference. Of those who have participated in virtual national conferences, over half reported the virtual meeting was worse than the live meeting version.

Given the uncertainty related to viability of live meetings extending well into next year and a reluctance among specialists to engage in national/international meeting content online, it is imperative for CME/CE to be designed in an engaging manner that reaches the specialists with needed relevant data. Specialists will continue to look for ways to interact with their peers and national experts. There is a challenge to CME/CE providers to facilitate this interaction as well as an opportunity to provide more engaging approaches than traditionally provided by live events.