

# Use of Instant Thickeners to Provide Routine Laxatives to Dysphagic Patients on Thickened Fluids

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## BACKGROUND:

Previously, Ipswich Hospital patients who have diagnosed dysphagia (i.e., swallow impairment) requiring thickened fluids were unable to safely receive routine laxatives, Movicol and Lactulose, due to their interference with the viscosity of the thickened fluids. The lack of procedures related to the use of instant thickeners to facilitate safe provision of routine laxatives resulted in dysphagic patients receiving alternative or sub-optimal options. When nil adequate alternative options were available, patients were provided with routine laxatives that interfered with the viscosity of the thickened fluids, increasing the risk of aspiration. As a result of nil procedures, individual patient cases required discussion between medical, pharmacy, speech pathology and nursing, resulting in inefficient patient care and ineffective use of staff time.

In July 2024, the West Moreton Health Speech Pathology department implemented a quality improvement project in which dysphagic patients requiring thickened fluids were provided laxatives, hand-thickened by trained nursing staff.

## AIM:

Primary aim: To trial the use of instant thickeners with laxatives for dysphagic patients for a period of one-month across two Ipswich Hospital wards, Stroke and Rehabilitation and Acute Care of the Elderly, to determine whether there were improvements in patient care and safety and staff satisfaction.

Secondary aim: To integrate the provision of instant thickeners with laxatives as part of routine care for dysphagic patients following project implementation, and to evaluate the safety of the project at a hospital-wide scale after an eight-month period.

## RESULTS:

Pre-trial questionnaire identified that 30% of nursing staff were unaware that laxatives are unsuitable for patients on thickened fluids and 100% of pharmacy, nursing and medical respondents identified that procedures related to hand-thickening of routine laxatives would be beneficial to patient care. It was evident from the questionnaire that various methods were utilised to provide laxatives to dysphagic patients requiring thickened fluids prior to the use of instant thickener (Figure 1).

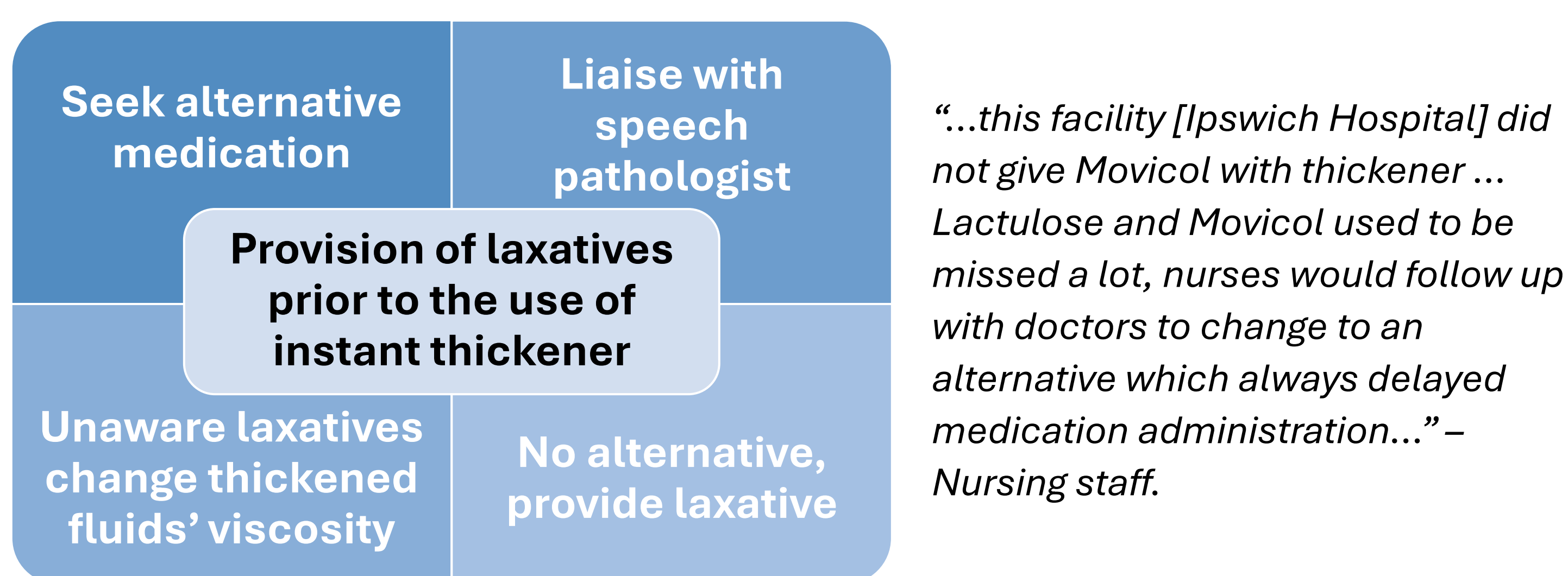


Figure 1 – Nursing staff responses regarding provision of laxatives prior to project.

Data analysis identified that 100% of patients benefitted from the use of instant thickener for routine laxatives and nil adverse events occurred during the trial period. Post-trial questionnaire demonstrated increased staff satisfaction and confidence rates and improved patient care (Figure 2).

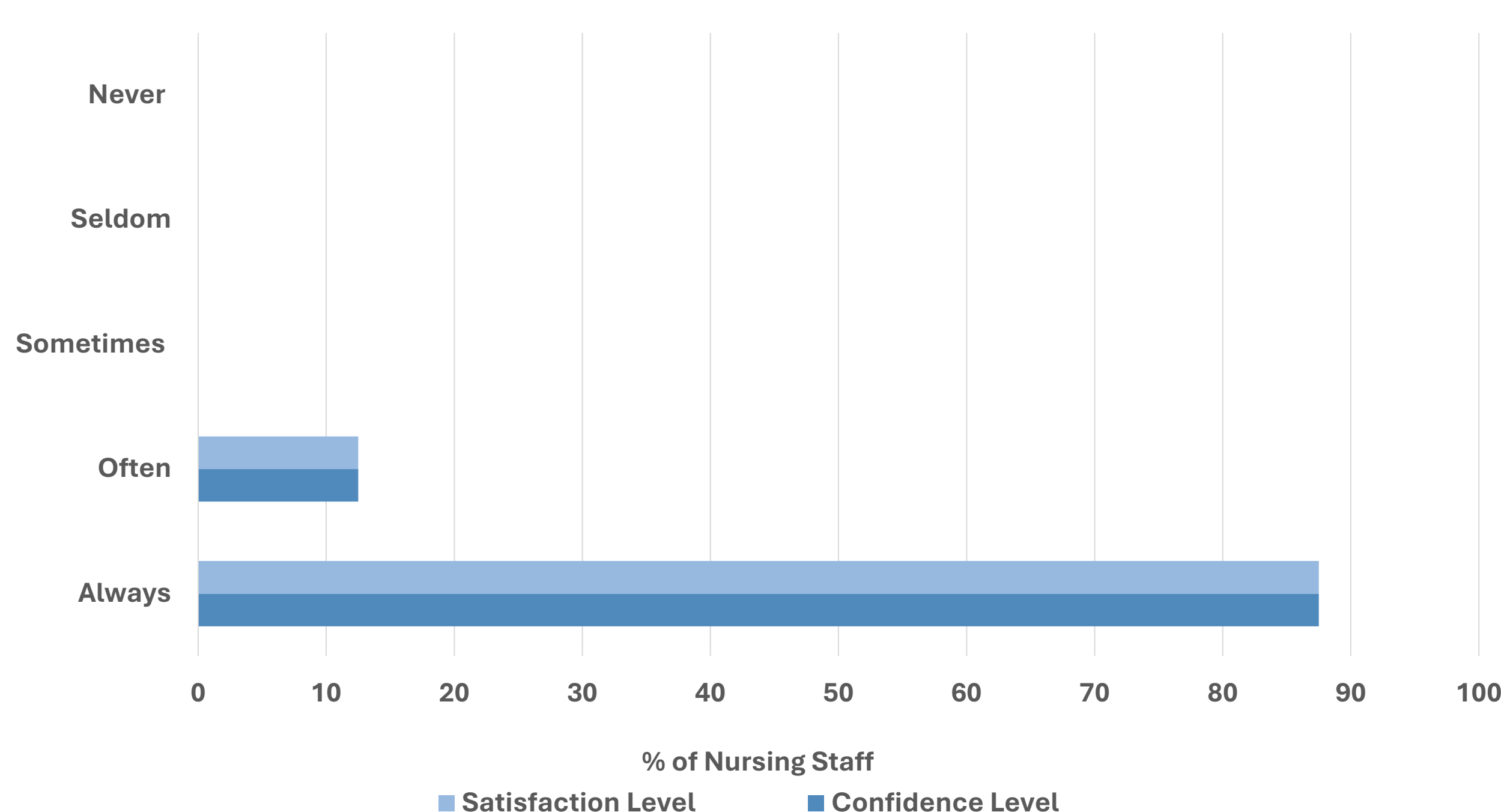
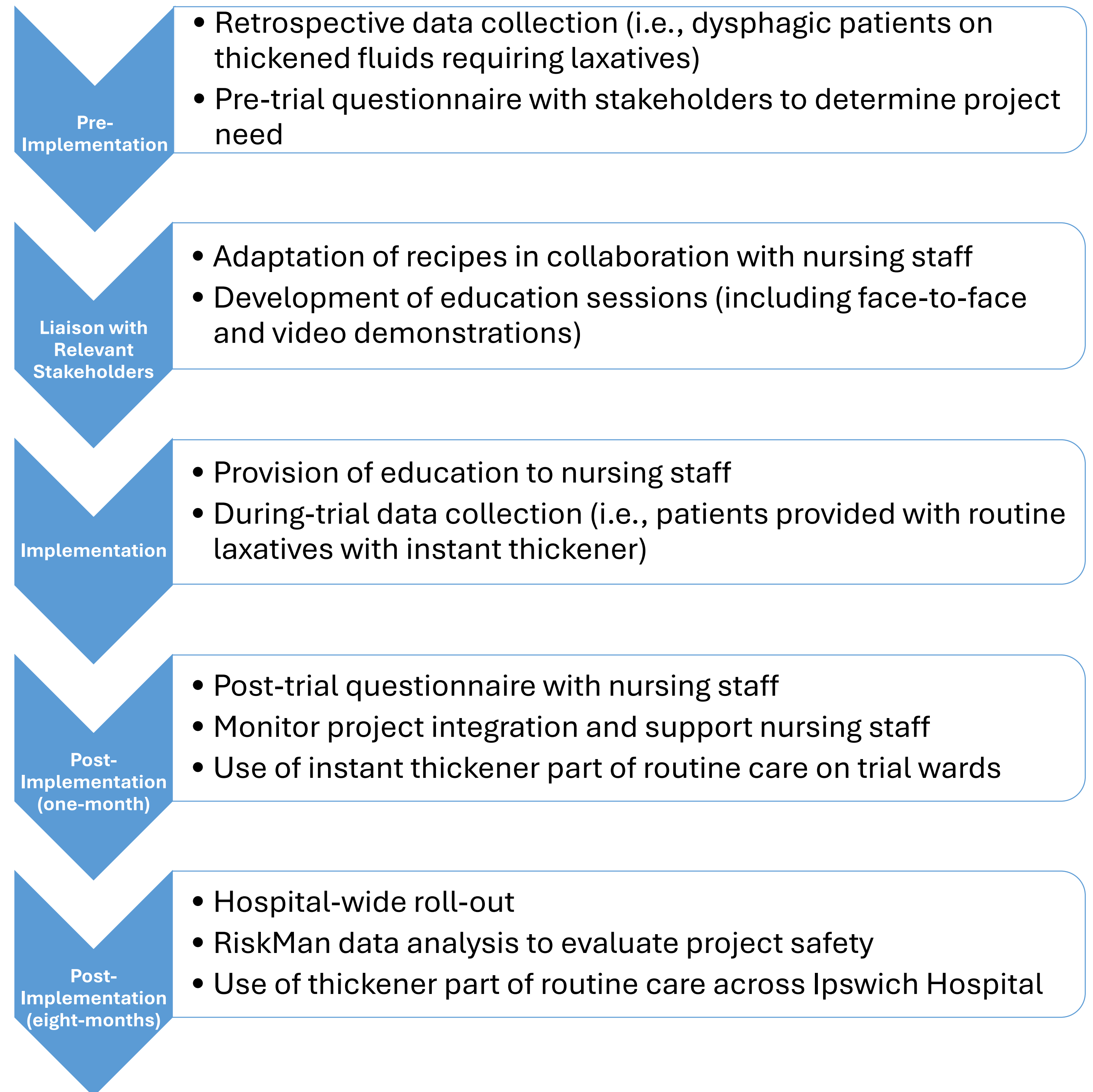


Figure 2 – Nursing staff confidence and satisfaction rates with implementation of hand-thickened laxatives.

## METHODS:



Nursing staff identified a number of benefits of hand-thickened laxatives (Figure 3). The project outcome was positive in ensuring access to commonly prescribed and well-tolerated treatment for constipation for optimal care, and the use of instant thickeners became part of routine care on Stroke and Rehabilitation and Acute Care of the Elderly wards. Following successful implementation, the hand-thickening of routine laxatives for dysphagic patients on thickened fluids was supported for commencement across Ipswich Hospital. RiskMan data analysis eight-months following hospital-wide roll-out confirmed nil adverse events occurred, demonstrating nil concerns for patient safety with the implementation of instant thickeners as an ongoing option.

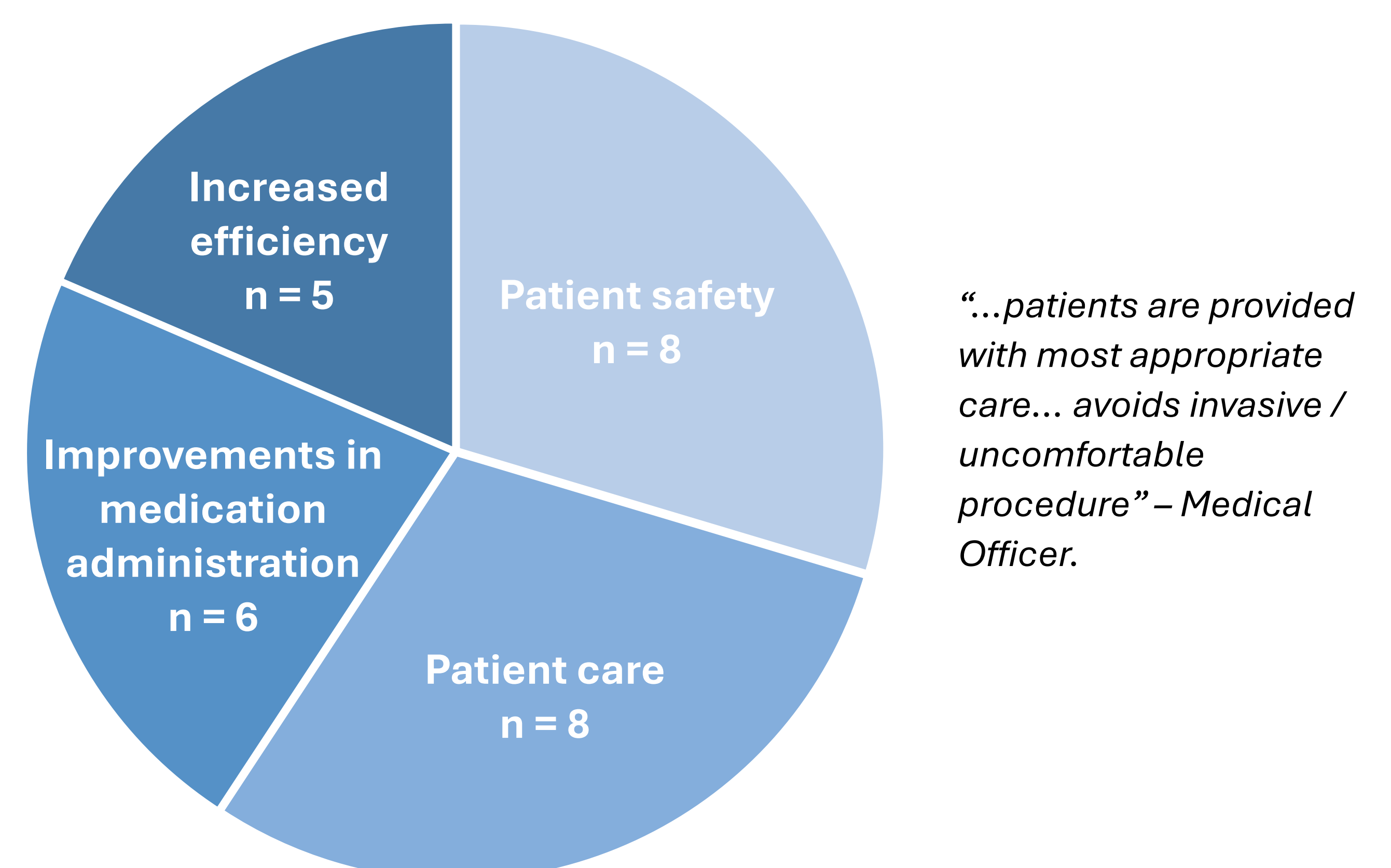


Figure 3 – Nursing staff identified benefits of hand-thickened laxatives.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Successful implementation of the project has supported and informed the development of additional processes for other routinely used medications for dysphagic patients on thickened fluids.