Effect of COVID-19 on Patient Empowerment: Views and Experiences from the 2020/21 Cardiff Community and Rural Education Route (CARER) Cohort
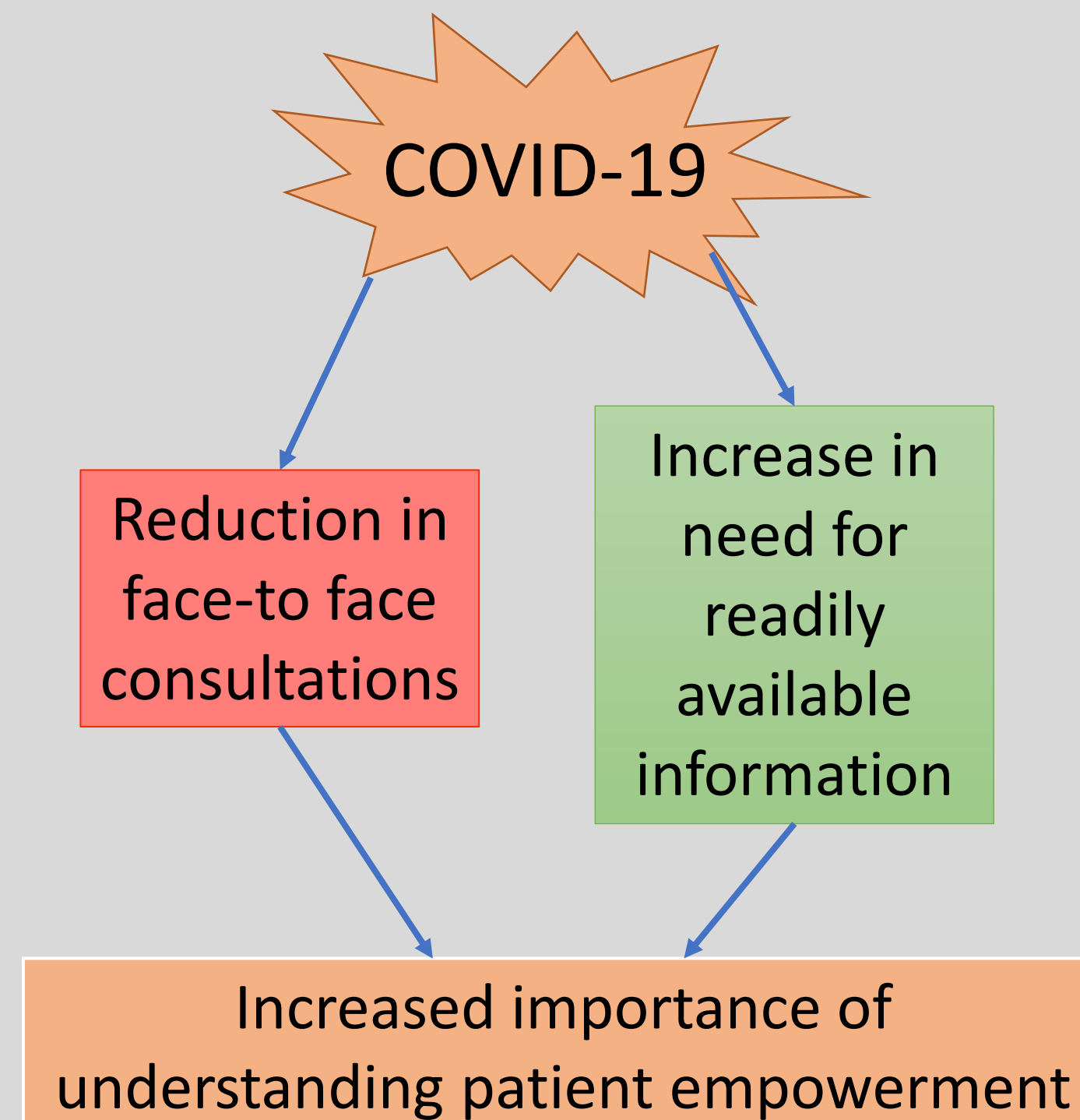
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Introduction

Medical professional awareness of patient empowerment is important to ensure appropriate use of communication skills within consultations.

The CARER project embedded third year medical students into rural General Practices (GPs) for a year-long longitudinal clerkship.

COVID-19

Reduction in face-to face consultations

Increase in need for readily available information

Increased importance of understanding patient empowerment

Results

We received 7 responses.

Four students reported an increase in patient empowerment through the pandemic, which was observed in both hospitals and GP. Four students found that working/volunteering [hospital HCA (4), GP surgery (2), nursing home (1), none (1)] through the pandemic altered their perspective of patient empowerment. Six students reported that COVID-19 improved their personal practice of patient empowerment (Fig. 1).

Future improvements for CARER include more patient-centered projects, focus groups, and emphasis on patient empowerment by GP tutors.

Patient Empowerment:

The provision of medical information to a patient and their ability to understand and make decisions.

Aims

To investigate the impact of COVID-19 on the experiences of patient empowerment for medical students undertaking the CARER project.

Methods

In this retrospective cohort study, a questionnaire was sent to all 12 of the 2020/21 CARER cohort to identify the impact of COVID-19 on personal awareness and clinical experience of patient empowerment.

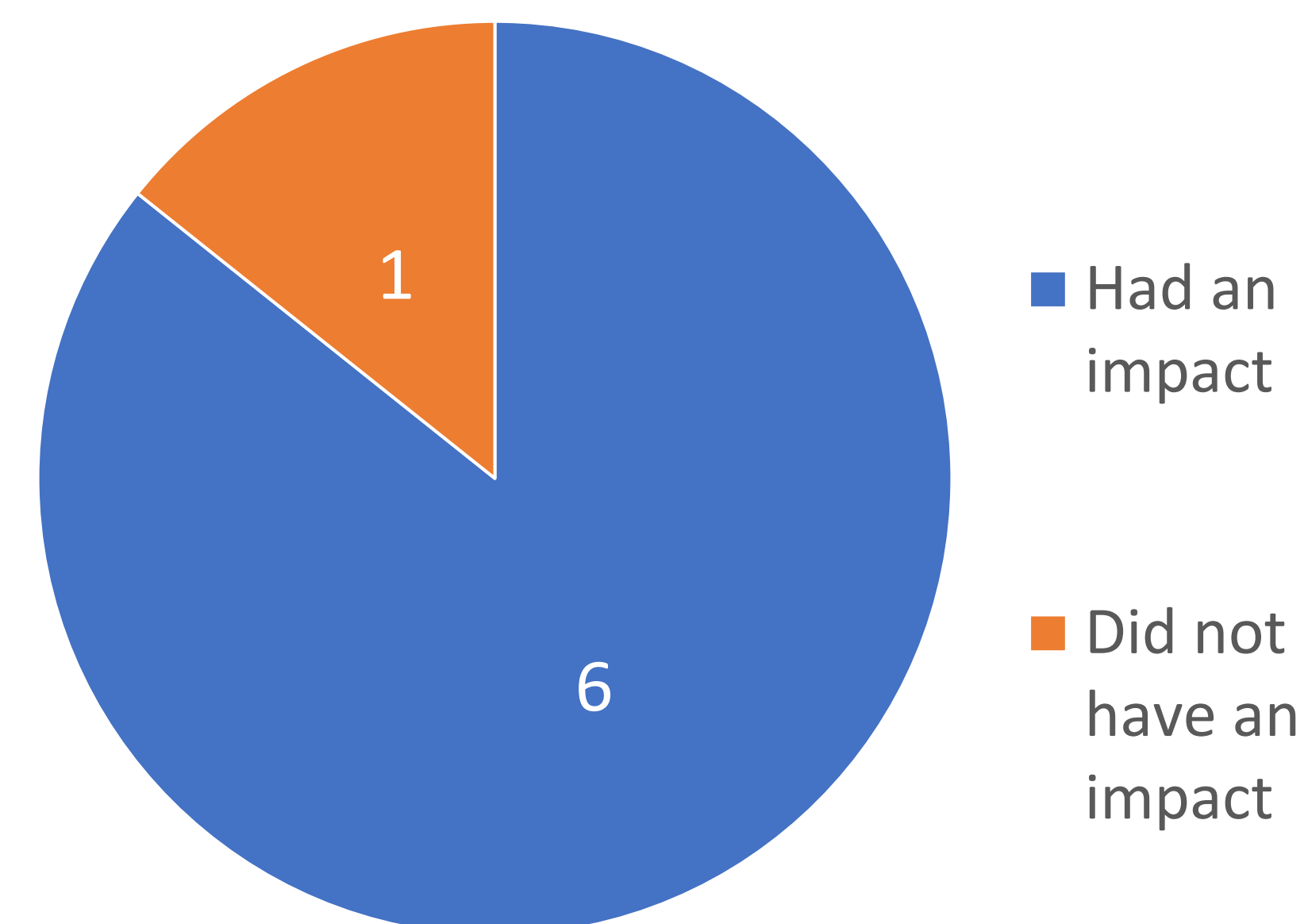**Figure 1**. Impact of COVID-19 on medical student personal practice of patient empowerment.

- Had an impact
- Did not have an impact

Figure 2. Impact of COVID-19 on medical student understanding of patient empowerment.

Prior to COVID-19 (mean)	Through COVID-19 (mean)
6.9/10	7.9/10

Discussion

COVID-19 improved CARER student awareness, experience and personal practice of patient empowerment. Further opportunities should be developed to tailor this important skill.