

Pushing Back the Tide of Opioid Prescribing

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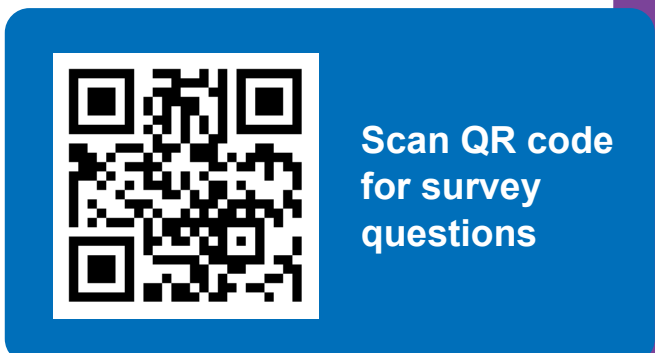
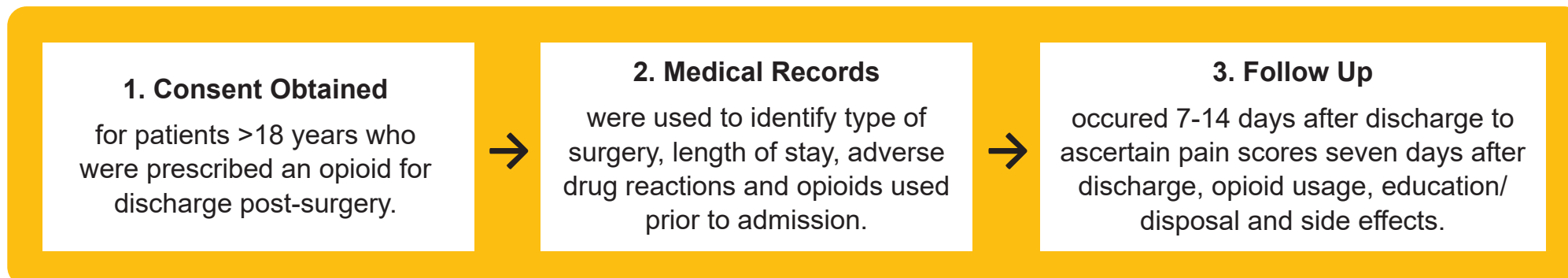
WHO flagship area - High-risk medicines

Aim

To gain an understanding of opioids prescribed and quantities required at discharge for postoperative pain relief.

Methods

Four prospective audits were undertaken over three week periods (2018-2019) across three private metropolitan/regional hospitals.



Results

A total of 199 patients were included in the study and 93% of patients were opioid naïve on admission. Orthopaedic surgery accounted for the most common surgery performed (see figure 1). Pain scores improved seven days post-discharge where 82% of patients reported absent to minor pain (see figure 2). A combination of opioids including SR formulations were received by 38% of patients on discharge. The most common analgesic prescribed for postoperative pain was oxycodone immediate-release (IR) with 164 out of 199 patients receiving supply. The average quantity prescribed exceeded the average quantity of tablets taken for all opioids (see figure 3). Awareness of correct disposal of opioids was only known to 37 patients.

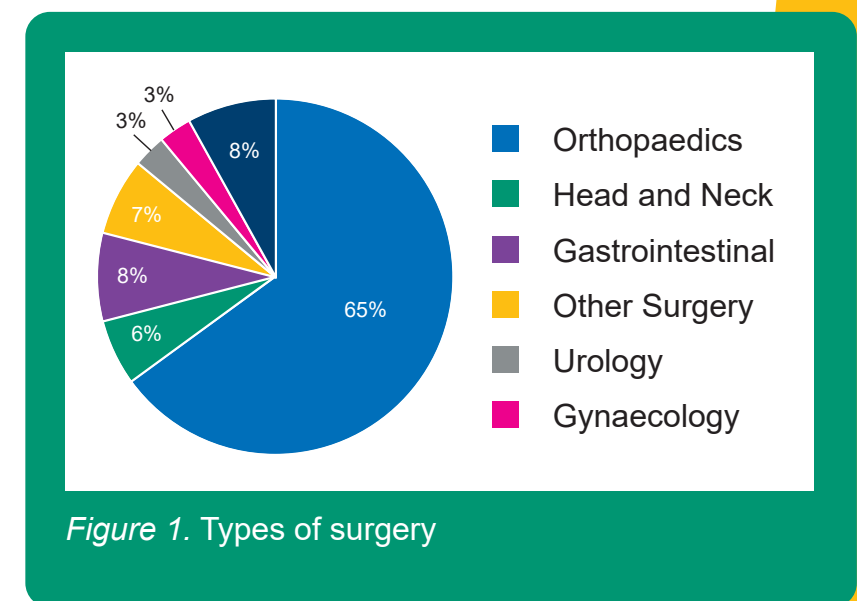
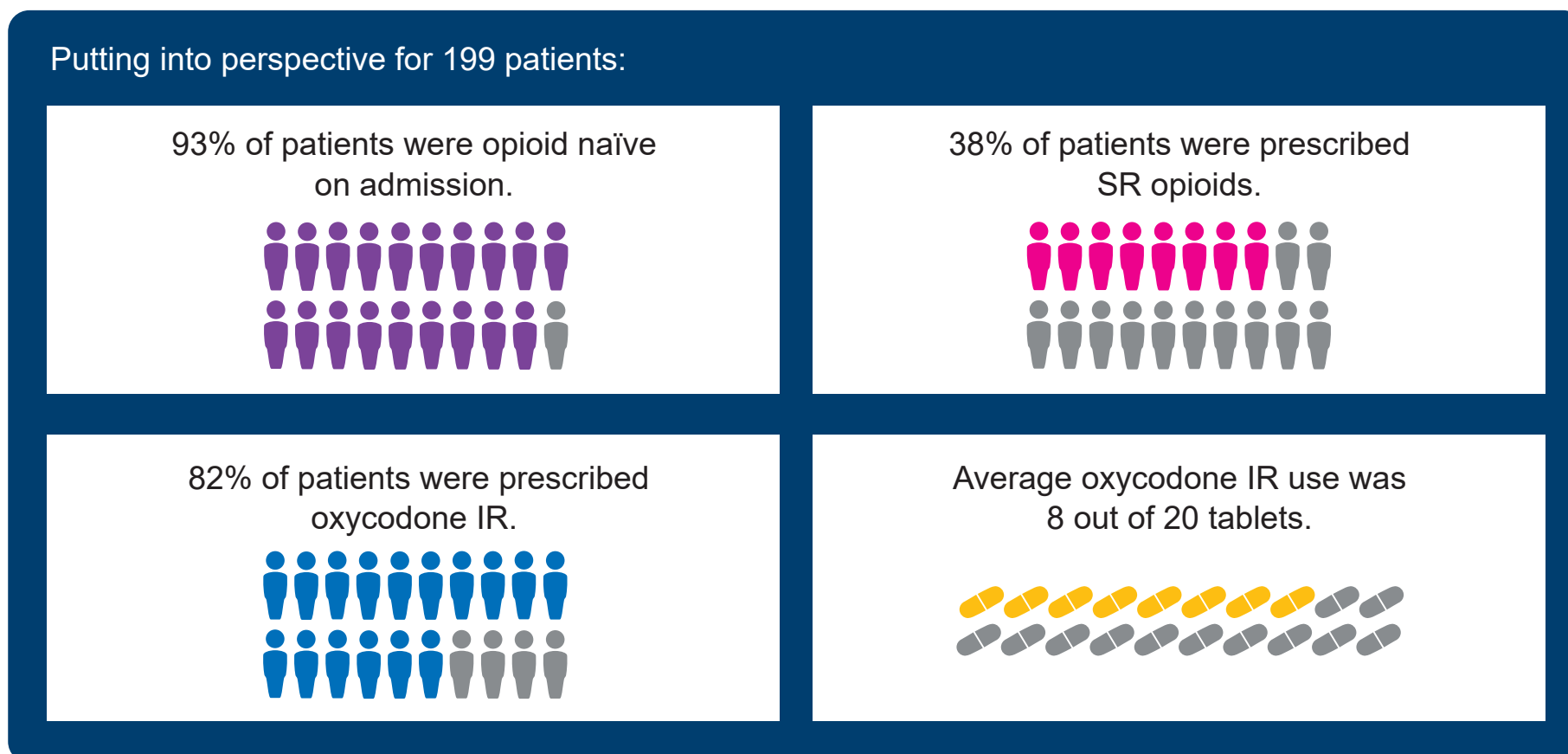


Figure 1. Types of surgery

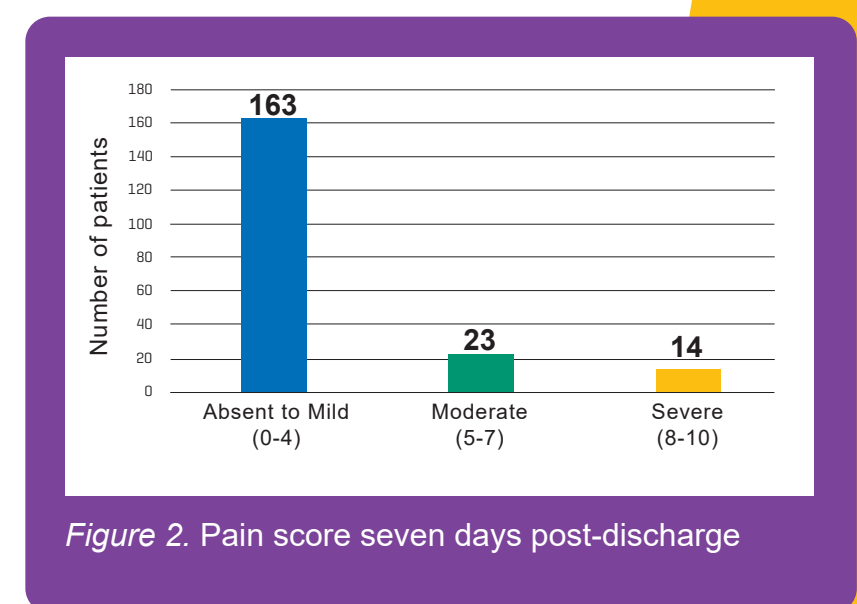


Figure 2. Pain score seven days post-discharge

Discussion

This study demonstrated opioid over-prescribing in postoperative pain relief. These results are consistent with both local and international findings.^{3,9} There are limited studies in Australia comparing the quantity of opioid tablets supplied with the quantity taken in the post-discharge setting. Available guidelines recommend a multimodal treatment approach where opioids are only prescribed if required for a maximum duration of seven days and advocate IR over SR preparations.^{1,9}

A powerful picture is presented of opioids supplied in excess of quantities required. Strategies which provide prescriber and governance support are necessary for safe opioid prescribing. Innovations currently being implemented across the organisations include:

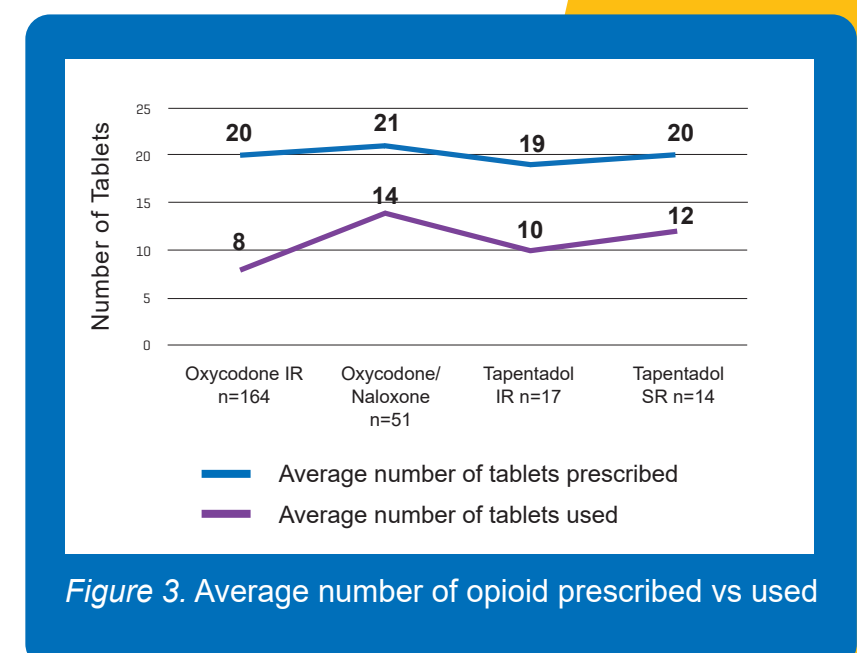
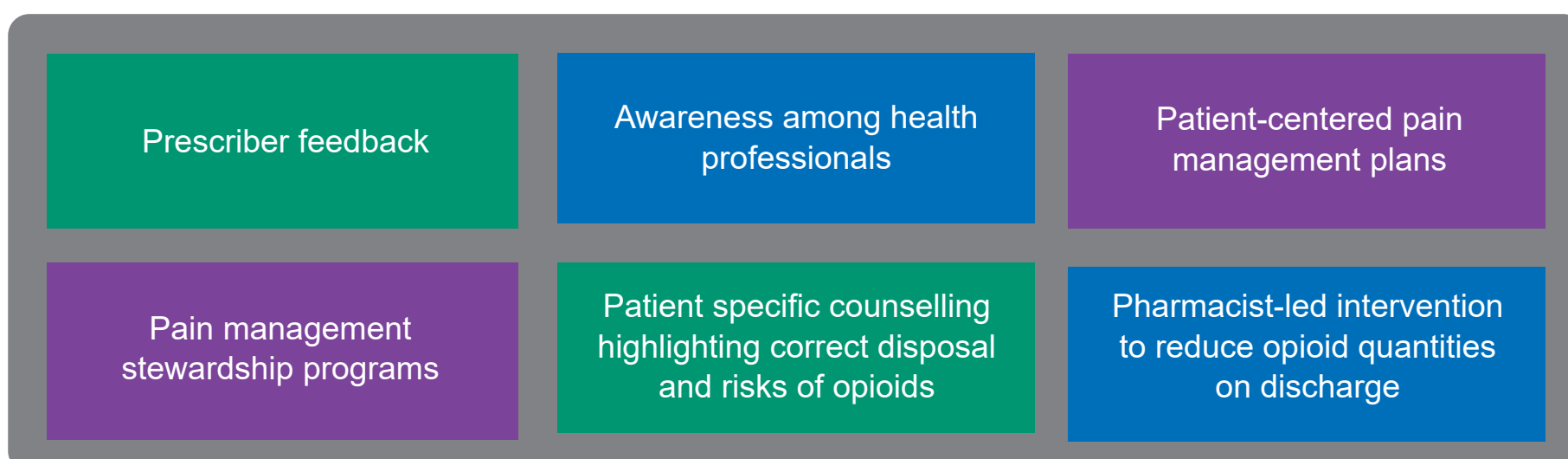


Figure 3. Average number of opioid prescribed vs used

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