



Improving the consent process for labour epidurals: A Quality Improvement Project

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Introduction

Provision of clear, concise information to patients undergoing procedures is critical. This is a particular challenge for people in labour. They are often distressed and in significant pain when requesting an epidural. It is therefore important that they are provided with easily digestible information to reinforce verbal discussions. We aimed to improve patient information on epidurals at West Suffolk Hospital including the creation of tools to complement verbal discussions in the antenatal and peripartum periods.

Methods

We used qualitative surveys of a range of staff and patients to guide the development of new, clear information for those wanting information about epidurals and their risks in labour. An initial survey was written and distributed in April 2022 to the midwives, obstetricians and anaesthetists to gather opinions on the existing text based epidural patient information leaflet. An updated illustrated epidural card (Fig. 1) taken from the Obstetric Anaesthetist's Association (OAA) was introduced in May 2022 (1).

Fig. 1 OAA Illustrated spinal information leaflet

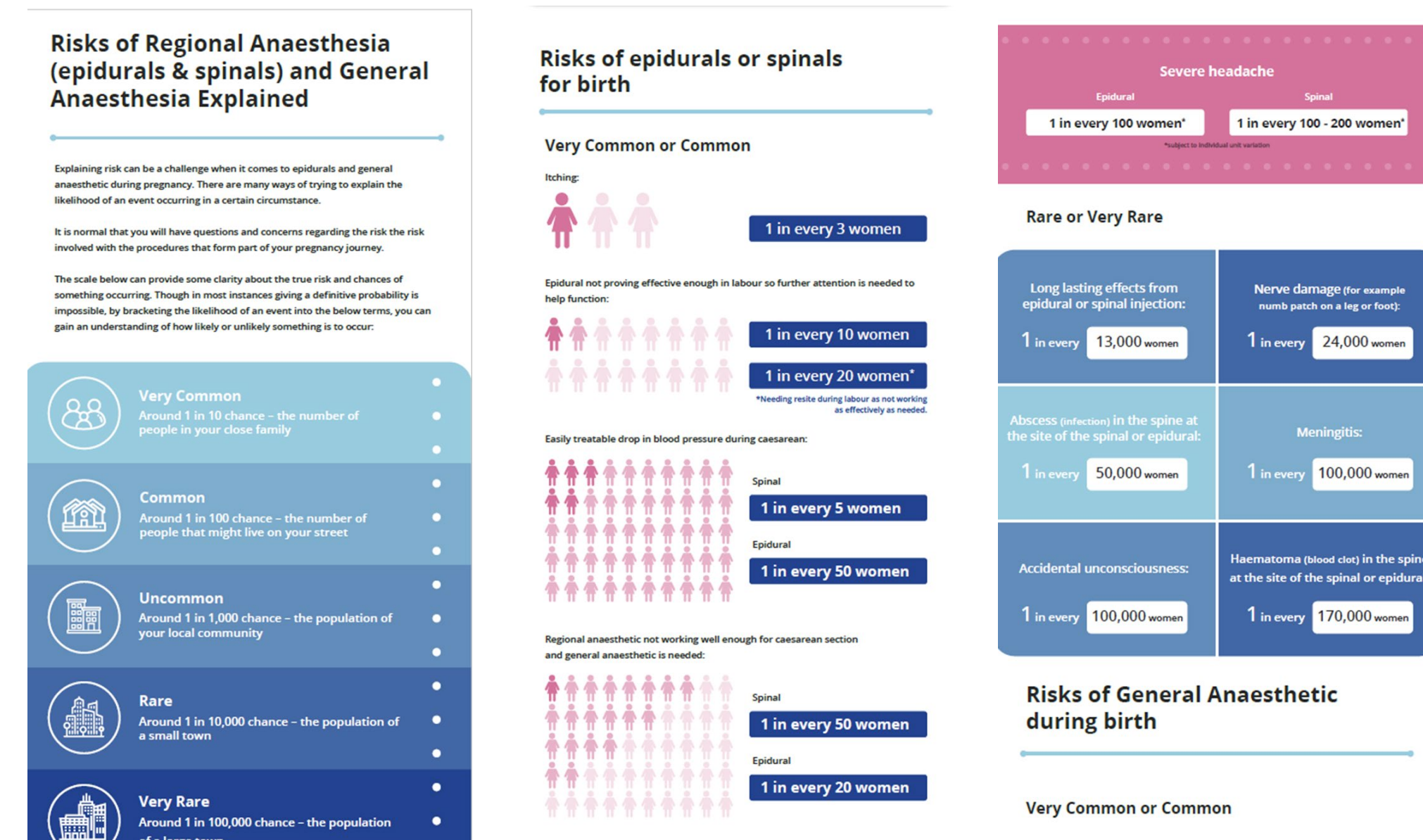
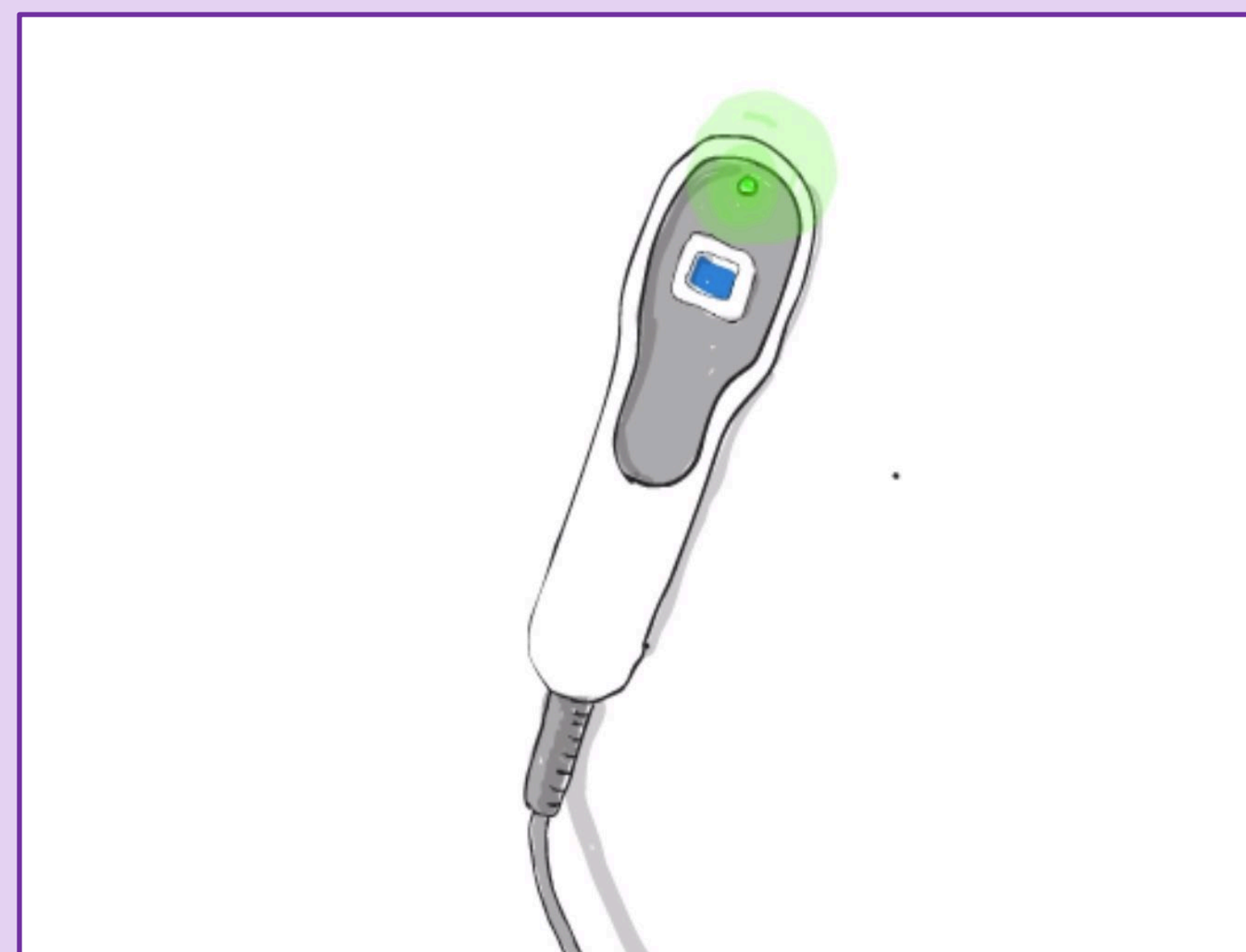
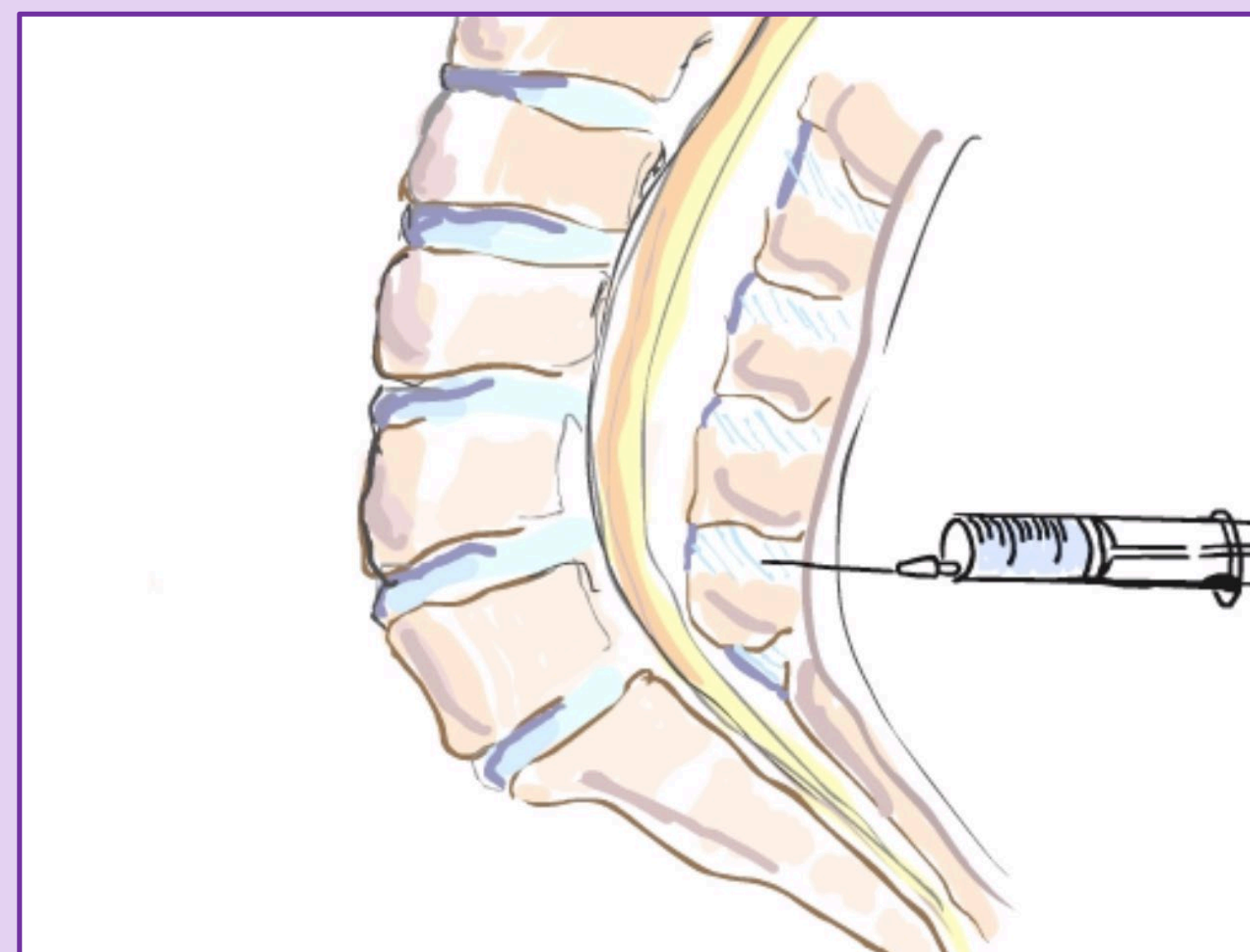


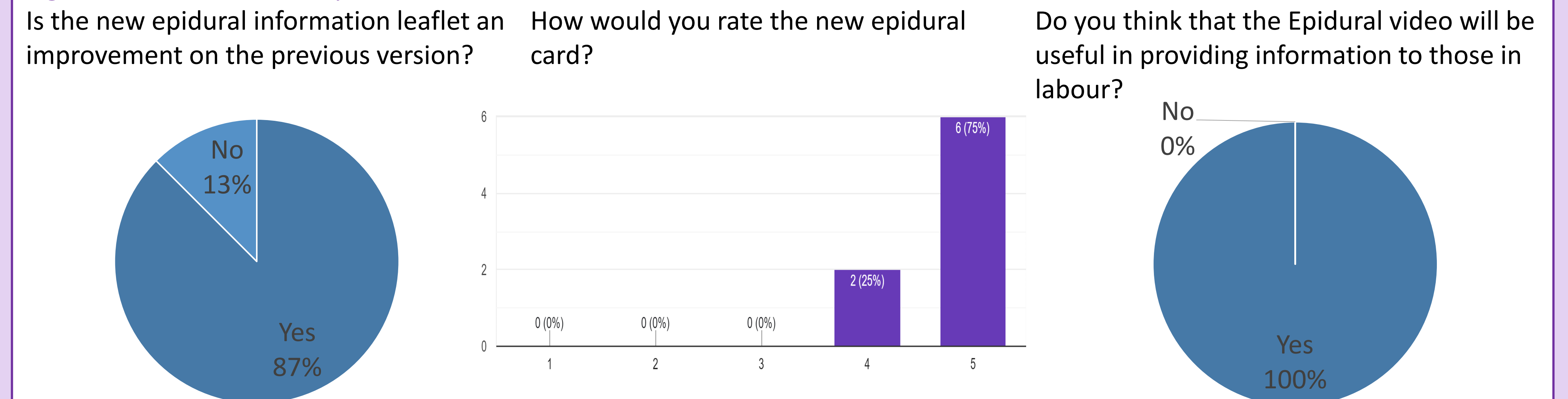
Fig. 2 Stills from video



Results

In the initial survey **94%** of midwives and **75%** of doctors thought the existing leaflet could be improved with an average rating of **3.4/5**. Importantly 88.3% of women required assistance to read the card. This may reflect a suboptimal presentation of information for those that are often unable to dedicate their full attention.

Fig. 3 Results of staff surveys



Results following the introduction of the new graphical card are shown in fig. 3. **87.5%** of responders felt the leaflet was an **improvement** in comparison to the original version with an improved rating of 4.75/5.

In the survey assessing the animated video has received good initial feedback from anaesthetists with **100%** of responders agreeing the video would be a useful aid. An interesting suggestion of a concise 1-2 minute version for those in labour is currently in development.

The full video has been positively received at the multidisciplinary obstetric meeting and is currently being reviewed by our 'patient voices' group and trust communication department.

Conclusion

High quality patient information prior to an epidural is crucial, we have introduced an updated leaflet and designed a succinct animated video, which has received exceptionally positive feedback. We feel that the ability to provide the same verified, easy to digest information is invaluable in improving the birth experience of those requesting epidurals.

References

1.Obstetric Anaesthetists' Association. Risks of Regional Anaesthesia (epidurals & spinals) and General Anaesthesia Explained. Available at: https://www.oaa-anaes.ac.uk/assets/managed/cms/files/ACCEA%202014/Labour%20pain%20infographic_July%202019.pdf

