

Pilot Evaluation of ESPEC-O: Advancing Social Work Competencies in Palliative and End-of-Life Oncology Care

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ESPEC-Oncology training has high interest among oncology social workers & promises to strengthen their roles for effective interprofessional practice & abilities to enhance cancer care delivery.

Introduction

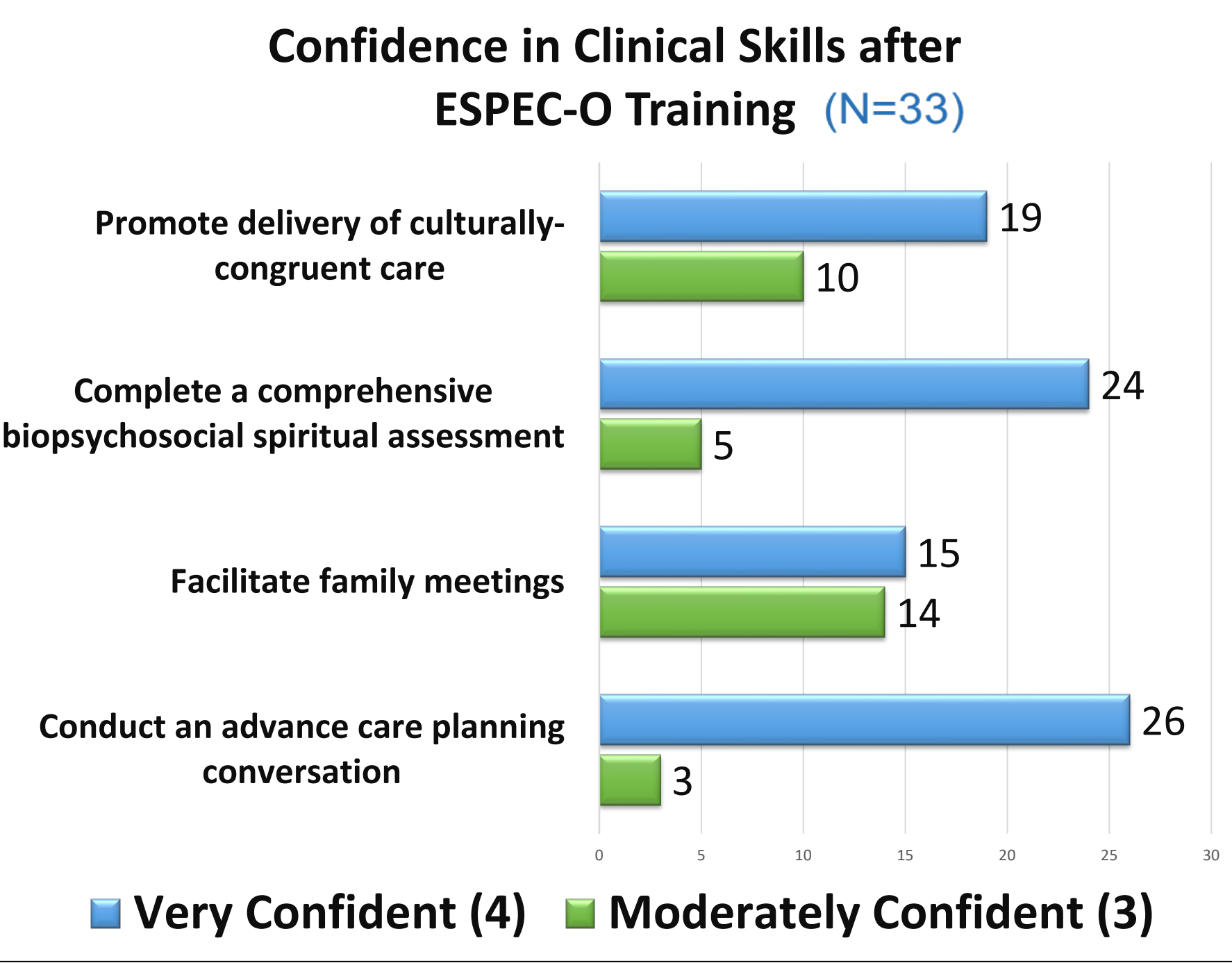
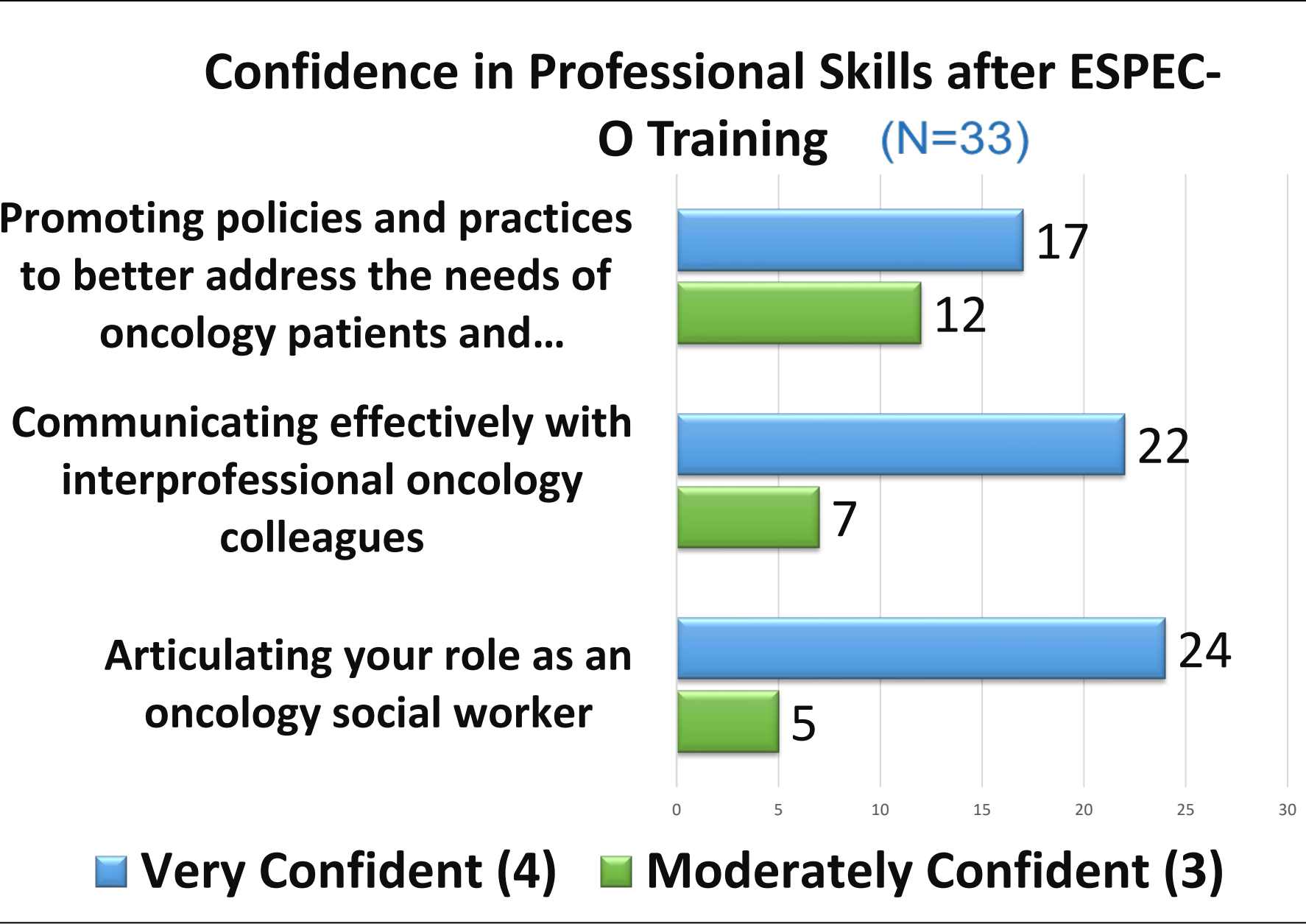
- Palliative Care Benefits:** Integrating palliative care into oncology improves the quality of life for cancer patients and their caregivers.
- Growing OSW Roles:** As the specialty expands, oncology social workers (OSWs) have more opportunities to join clinical teams and take on leadership roles.
- The Training Gap:** While palliative training has grown rapidly for physicians and nurses, comparable programs for OSWs have lagged.
- Our Response (ESPEC-O):** To bridge this gap, we developed and pilot-tested Educating Social Workers in Palliative & End-of-Life Care in Oncology (ESPEC-O).
- Program Goal:** This evidence-based, multimodal curriculum provides engaging content and leadership training to help competitively selected OSWs integrate primary palliative skills into their daily oncology practice.

Methods

- Recruitment emails announcing this training were sent to the Association of Oncology Social Work database (1000+members).
- Over 100 applications were submitted (for 33 spots) to participate in eight hours of self-directed online modules & a four-hour virtual, synchronous workshop in May-June 2024.
- After attending the workshop, learners completed a post-workshop survey exploring their self-rated knowledge & confidence in clinical & professional skills resulting from ESPEC-O training.
- Qualitative feedback was gathered through open-ended questions designed to allow learners to reflect on the most impactful aspects of the workshop & provide suggestions for improvement.

Results

- OSWs (N=33) from 19 U.S. states were competitively selected to participate.
- They reported high palliative & leadership knowledge growth attributable to ESPEC-O training (M=8.03, range: 0="not at all" to 10, with 8-10 being "a great deal").
- Self-rated confidence scores in clinical skills (M=3.72, range=1-4) & professional skills (M=3.70, range=1-4) suggested moderate to high confidence.
- Qualitative feedback revealed high satisfaction with training, importance of practical tools, and new skill development in formalizing palliative care practice.
- Suggested improvements included an increase in the number & length of breakout sessions & more content on OSW leadership in interprofessional oncology teams.



Participant Feedback

-I loved the idea of creating action steps throughout this training. This opportunity to pause allowed me to organize the material in ways that directly impact my work with clients and envision how I can put these skills into practice.

-I think I take a palliative approach to my day-to-day work in oncology. However, hearing other OSWs (especially those who led the training) discuss how they integrate palliative care into this setting has given me the tools (and excitement) to formalize and grow this component of my practice.

-I have found the most impactful aspect of the ESPEC-O training has been the robust amount of research, practical tools, and space held to discuss with other social workers in the field with various backgrounds and perspectives.

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