

Educational support across the canine osteoarthritis journey: a survey of dog owner perceptions

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1. Objectives

To explore **owner perceptions of educational support** for canine osteoarthritis (OA) across their **dog's OA journey** and identify **opportunities for improvement**.

Methodology

A **cross-sectional, attitudinal** survey was conducted among dog owners to explore **awareness and educational experiences related to OA**. An initial screening survey was distributed to **1,351 dog owners** to identify those whose dogs had either received a veterinary diagnosis of OA or had OA suspected during a veterinary consultation. A total of **350 eligible respondents** were identified and included in the study. These respondents completed a structured questionnaire focusing on three key stages:

- (1) **Awareness of OA** and educational needs **prior to veterinary identification**
- (2) Educational support at the time **OA was first raised** by a veterinarian
- (3) Education and information needs related to **ongoing OA management**

Quantitative data were analysed descriptively, while open-text responses were reviewed using thematic analysis to identify common themes and insights.

3. Educational support at time of OA diagnosis or suspected OA

At the time of diagnosis, **93% of owners** reported being **satisfied or very satisfied** with the explanation provided regarding OA and its management.

Vets were considered the **most trusted source of information** for understanding and managing OA. This was **followed by veterinary physiotherapists and professional veterinary bodies** (e.g. BSAVA, WSAVA).

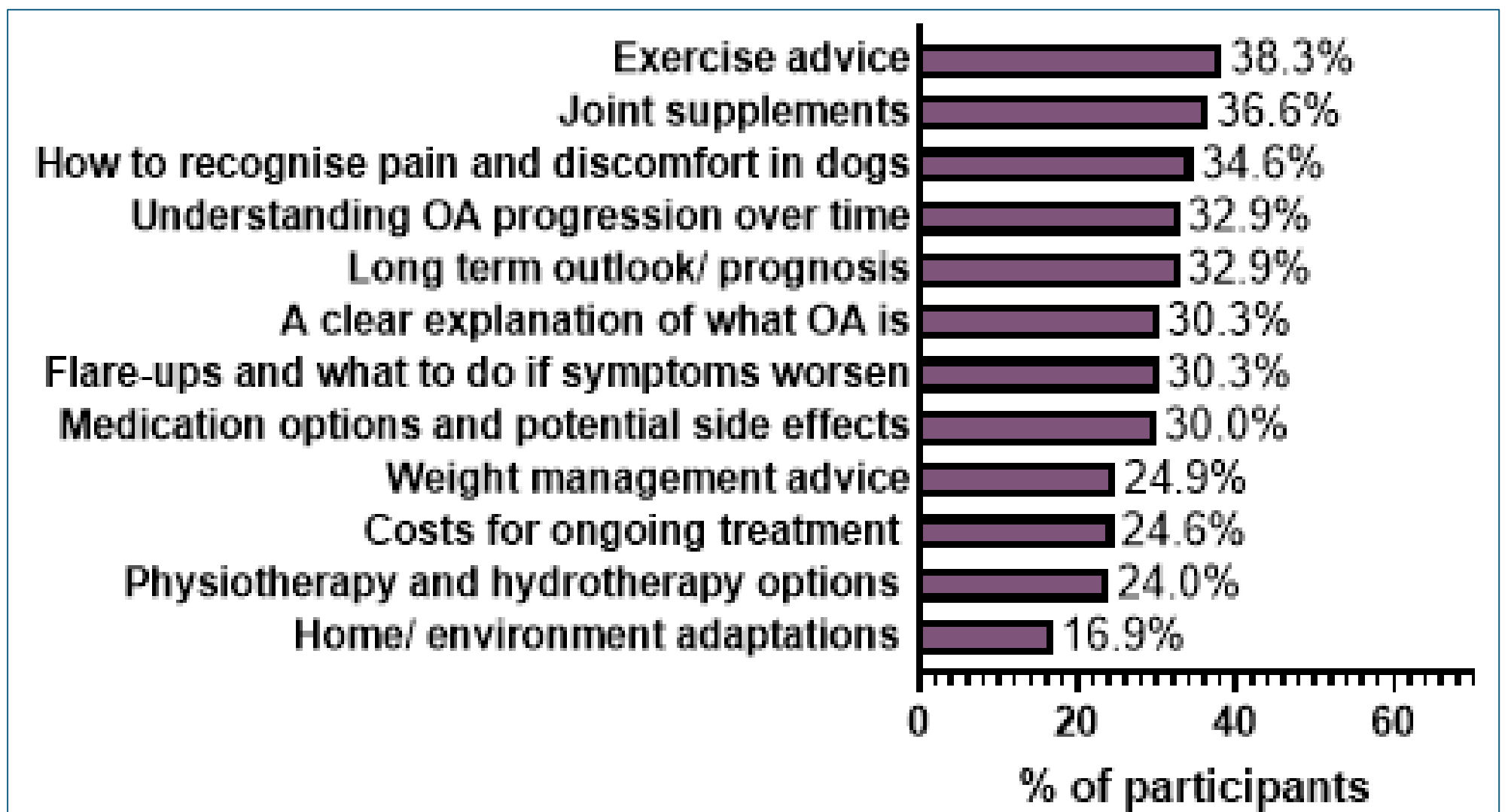


Figure 2: Owner responses to the question "What information would have been most helpful at the time that OA was first discussed?". Owners could select multiple options.

In response to what information would have been most helpful at the time of OA discussion, owners most frequently selected **practical advice**—particularly exercise and recognising pain—**alongside information on disease progression, prognosis, and treatment options**. **Weight management and environmental adaptations were selected less often**.

5. Owner Reflections: What they wish they'd known sooner

To better understand the owner journey, we asked two open-ended questions—and the responses highlight a clear theme: **earlier recognition and action matter**.

"I would have acted sooner by speaking to my vet at the first signs of stiffness instead of assuming it was just ageing."

2. Looking back, what would they do differently?
42.1% wouldn't change their approach. But for those who would:
48.9% would have **intervened earlier**
15.3% would have **taken more time to understand the condition**

1. What do owners wish they had known sooner?
Over a third (36.9%) felt confident in their knowledge. However, among those who didn't, **nearly half (45.5%) wished they had recognised the signs earlier** to act sooner

"I wish I had known it's not the same as my osteoarthritis... dogs experience pain very differently."

2. Educational support prior to diagnosis or discussion of suspected OA during veterinary consultation

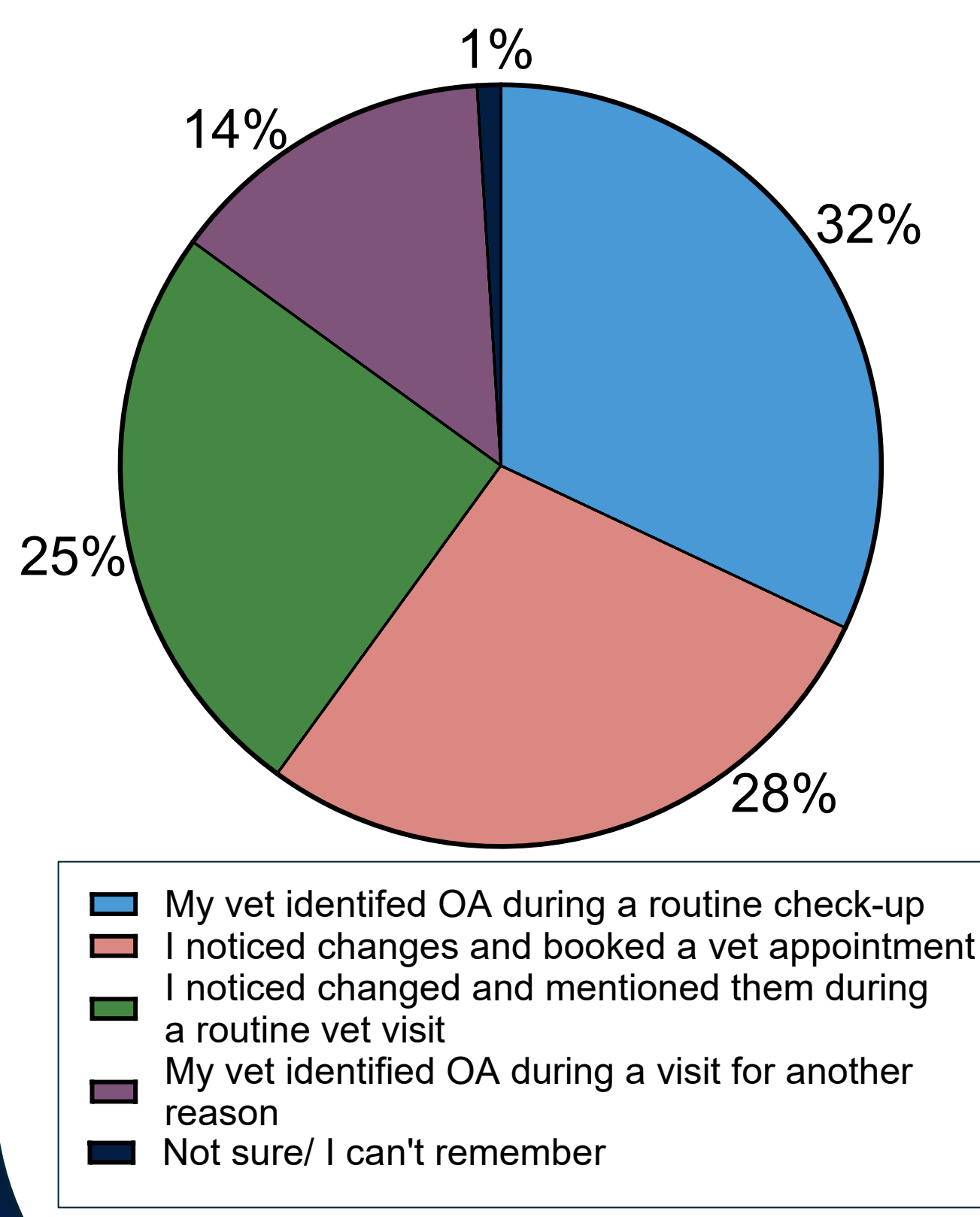


Figure 1: Responses to the question "How was your dog's osteoarthritis first identified or discussed?"

- **46% of owners** were attending the veterinary practice for an **unrelated reason** when OA was **first identified or suspected**.
- **Prior to identification:**
 - **4% of owners had not heard of OA**
 - A further **23%** were aware of OA but **not of its clinical signs**
- **90% of owners** reported they would have contacted their **veterinarian sooner** if they had been **more aware of early signs of OA**
- **Web-based resources** were identified as the **most helpful educational tools** for early recognition of OA signs
- **49% of owners** would have preferred educational content to contain **moderate amounts of information** (5-10minute read/watch) with around **26% of owners** preferring a **very detailed in-depth guide**

4. Educational support during ongoing management

- **90% agree** with the statement **"I feel well informed and knowledgeable about how to manage my dog's OA"**
- **94% of owners felt either satisfied or very satisfied by their vet practice** when it comes to education and information about their dog's OA

- When asked which non-medication options had been discussed for long-term OA management, owners most commonly reported joint supplements, **with less discussion around other strategies such as weight management, exercise, environmental adaptations, and access to allied professionals**.

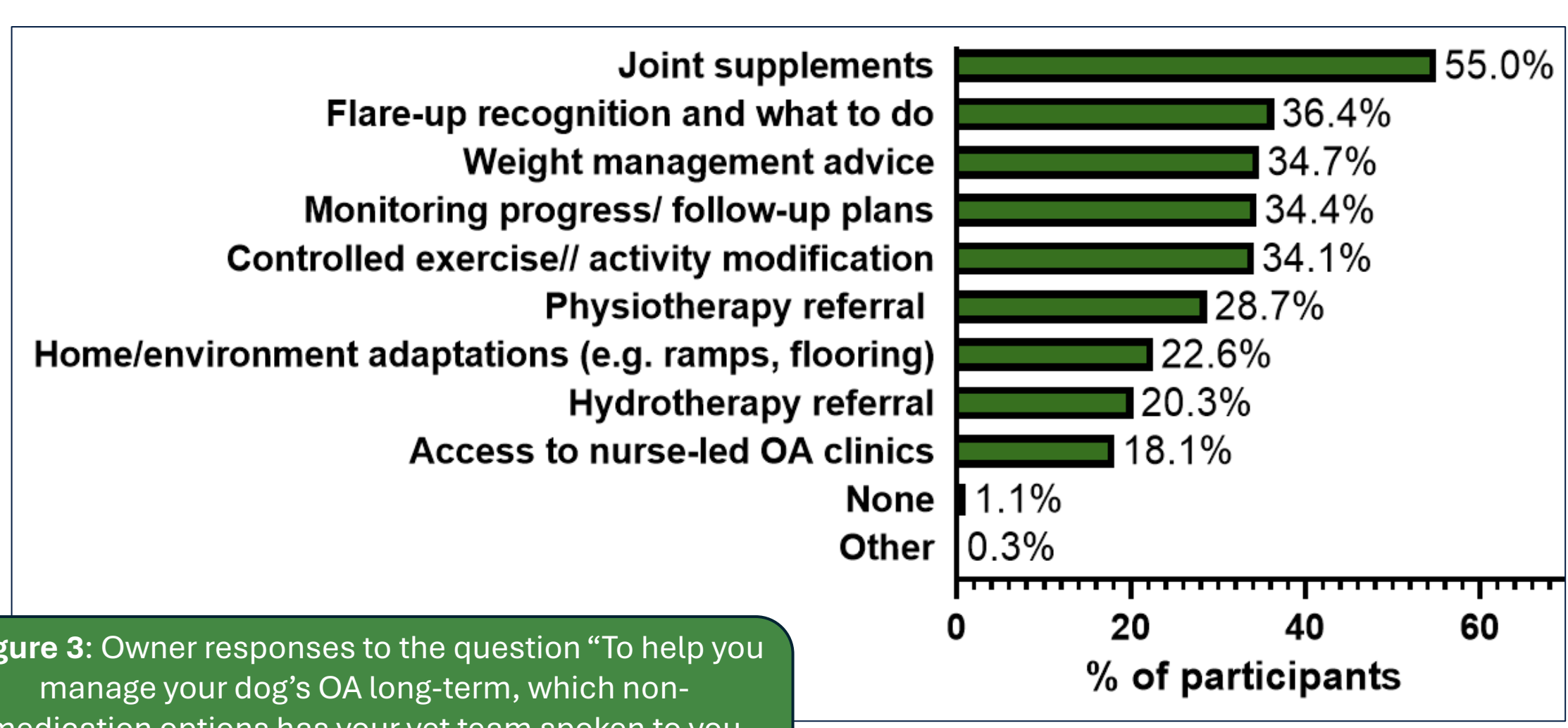


Figure 3: Owner responses to the question "To help you manage your dog's OA long-term, which non-medication options has your vet team spoken to you about or provided information on?". Owners could select multiple options.

- Only **18% were informed about nurse-led OA clinics** yet **95% of owners would feel comfortable** receiving OA education and follow up from a vet nurse

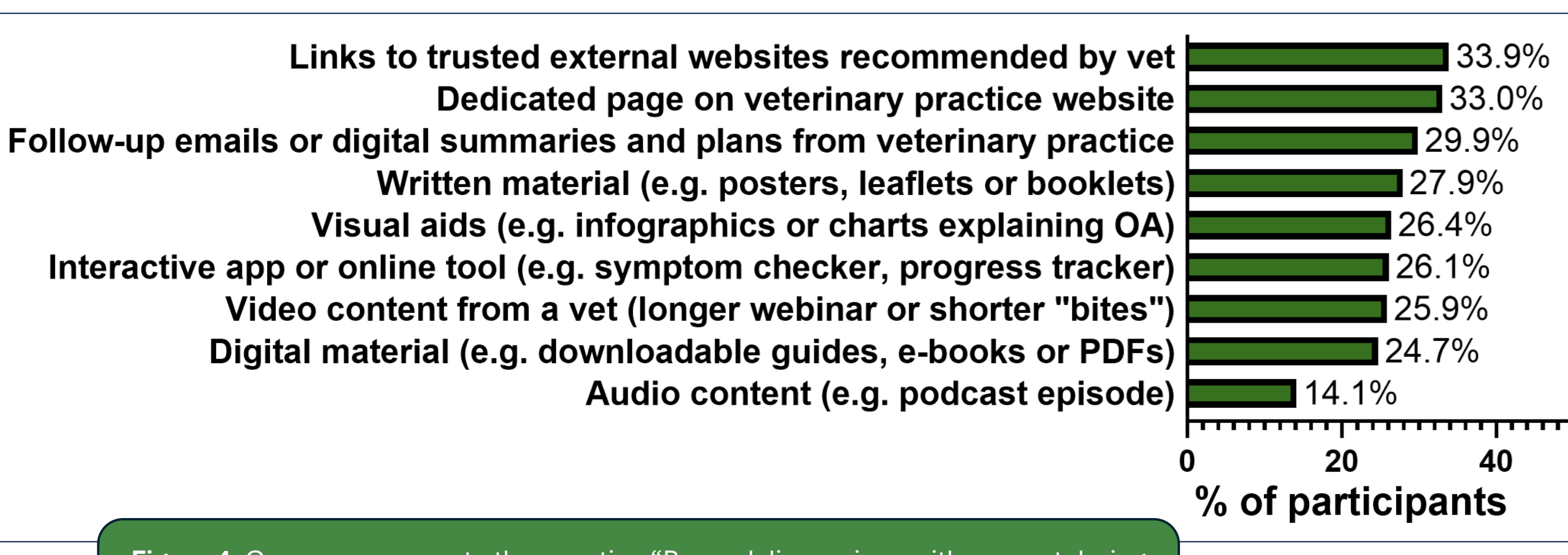


Figure 4: Owner responses to the question "Beyond discussions with your vet during consultation, which resources would have been most helpful in supporting you in ongoing management of your dog's OA?". Owners could select up to 3 answers

- Owners cited **web-based resources** as being most helpful in supporting the ongoing management of their dog's OA.

6. Conclusions

- Veterinary professionals are a trusted source of information, with **over 90% of owners satisfied with the education and information provided by their vet practice about their dog's OA**
- Educational needs appear to evolve across the disease journey, highlighting the importance of **stage-specific support** from pre-diagnosis through to long-term management. **Improving education** across these stages may enable earlier intervention, enhance owner experience, and support better long-term outcomes.
- At the **early stage**, survey findings highlight a need to improve **recognition and education** around canine OA, as many cases were identified incidentally, suggesting **gaps in owner awareness** despite willingness to seek earlier veterinary advice.
- During **ongoing management**, there is an opportunity to broaden education to include additional components of a multimodal approach, such as **allied professional support** and **home/environmental adaptations**.
- There is **demand for accessible, vet-endorsed digital resources**, alongside greater utilisation of **veterinary nurses**, who were identified in this survey as a **trusted but underused source of support**.
- Findings should be **interpreted with caution** due to reliance on owner-reported data and potential limitations in sample size and population representativeness.