



Clients with MS: Do No Harm

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Background:

Mood dysregulation and cognitive changes are among the most common symptoms of MS and without appropriate treatment can seriously affect quality of life. Access to knowledgeable mental health care can be limited for many people living with MS across the country. The need for mental health treatment increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, but options for care also widened due to increased acceptance of telehealth.

In 2020, the California, Nevada, and Hawaii Healthcare Provider Council (HPC) of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society (Society) identified a need for virtual mental health professional education during the pandemic, to increase knowledge of MS for providers who are less experienced in working with this population. To address this and the changing telehealth landscape, a professional education program targeting these issues was created and accredited by the Consortium of MS Centers.

The title of the program, Clients with MS: Do No Harm comes from a reminder of the Hippocratic Oath which includes the promise to "abstain from doing harm." Changing clinician practice and interventions based on increased knowledge about MS including an understanding of cultural and health inequity issues is an important key to providing mental health services that improve the mental health of people living with MS and a better treatment partnership with clients overall.

Provider Education = Better Treatment Outcomes

Objective:

The goal of the program was to provide licensed mental health professionals training to increase knowledge of culturally sensitive interventions, methods of increasing client resiliency, improving client self-management and ownership of health and life decisions, whole family treatment, and referral resources for people living with MS.

9:00am	Welcome & Introduction Katelyn Michtich, MBA – National MS Society
9:05am	MS Symptom Management Pearl Werfel, PhD – Private Practice
9:45am	Neuropsychological Considerations Linda Trettin, PhD – Mercy General Hospital, Folsom Neuropsychology
10:25am	Break
10:30am	Culturally Sensitive Team-Based Care Amber Landers, PhD – Alliant University
11:10am	Partners and Parents with MS Rhoda Olkin, PhD – Alliant University
11:50am	Questions & Answer

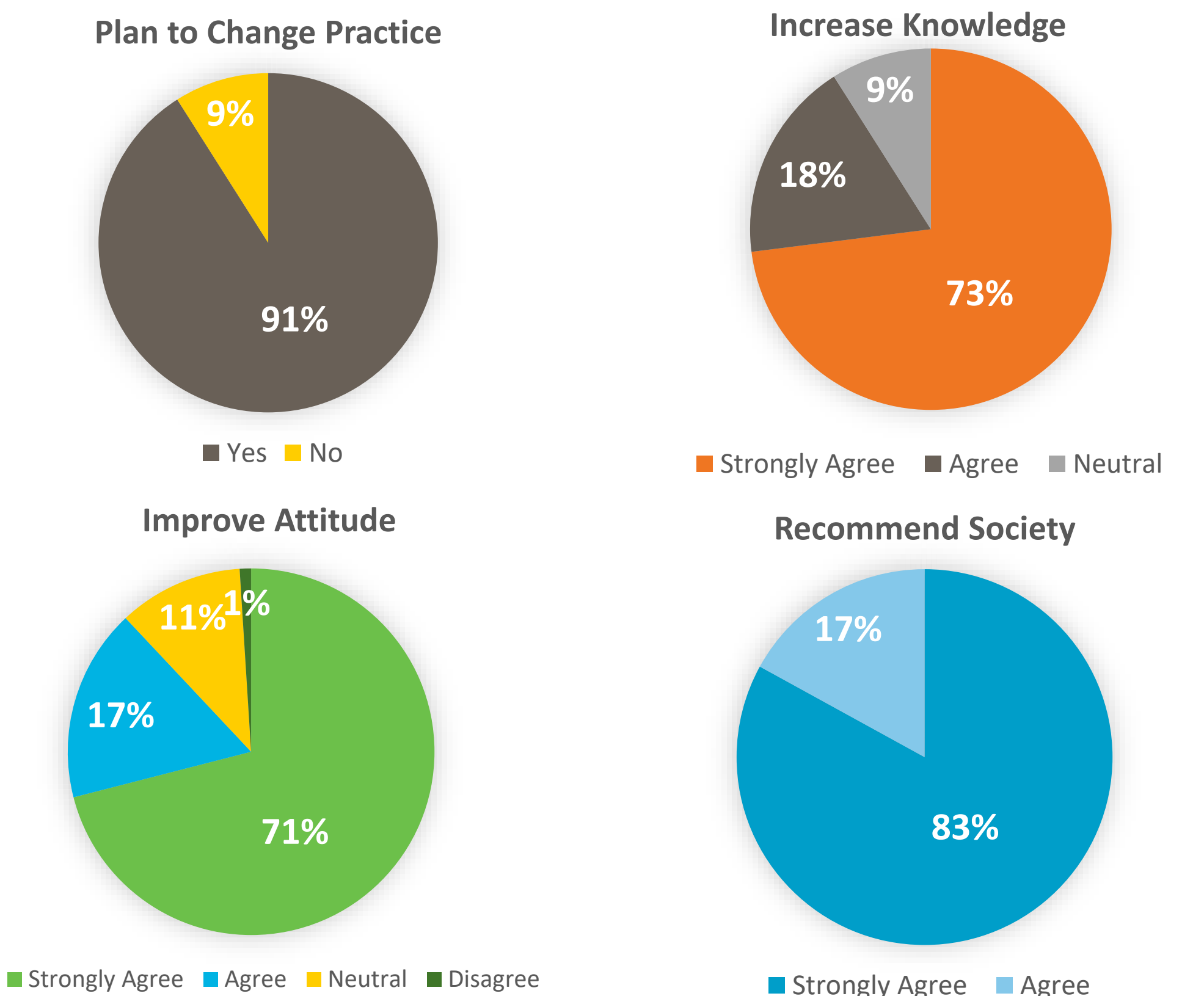
Methods:

The HPC recruited a group of MS expert psychologists to design and deliver the virtual program. Content focused on symptom management, neuropsychological conditions, cultural intersectionality in MS, and working with partners and parents with MS.

The program was delivered using vignettes, case presentations, interactive polling, and offered an opportunity to network with mental health professionals. The program was recorded and available for one year for the continued training of mental health professionals.

Results:

Over 400 mental health providers participated. From the evaluations, 91% of participants planned to change their practice or behavior as a result of participating in the program, 73% strongly agreed the program improved their knowledge of MS care, 71% strongly agreed the program improved their attitude towards providing healthcare for people with MS, and 83% strongly agreed they would refer a friend or a colleague to the Society.



Conclusion:

A virtual educational program specifically targeting content regarding the cultural, resiliency and self management needs of people living with MS is an effective method for delivering specialized MS education to licensed mental health professionals across the country and improves access to high quality MS care.