

Lights, Camera, Refer!

An Audit of referrals to the Dermatology service: use of photo attachments and photo quality

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INTRODUCTION

'Tele dermatology' refers to the use of static digital images to triage, diagnose, monitor or assess skin conditions without the patient being physically present.¹ Although, this form of telemedicine has been growing for many years, in the last few years this has taken more precedent given the staffing issues in Dermatology throughout the country, demanding a change in the delivery of the services.² Even more recently, the limitations and adaptations required by the current COVID-19 Pandemic has also required a national NHS response for an alternative to face-to-face outpatients.³

In Dumfries & Galloway (D&G), Dermatology department receives the 4th highest proportion of referrals in this region after Orthopaedics, General Surgery and Ophthalmology. The Dermatology service has over the years encouraged photo attachments with referrals from the community. The sending of images with referrals is advantageous for the department with regards to triaging referrals to the right clinic; advice and guidance given to GPs and reducing unnecessary appointments at the hospital.

AIM

- Identify the proportion of SCI-gateway referrals to D&G Dermatology service with photo attachments
- Assess the quality of photos attached with the referrals

METHOD

- A retrospective study was carried out to look at SCI-gateway referrals to D&G Dermatology service in August 2019 and 2020.
- A list was compiled from SCI-store and referrals accessed via Clinical Portal to extract relevant information for data analysis
- Excluded referrals were duplicate referrals or referrals not found on Clinical Portal.
- The quality of photos were assessed as Poor (very blurry or unclear), Acceptable (slightly blurry or unclear) or Excellent (In focus and very clear)

RESULTS

AUGUST 2019 REFERRALS: PHOTOS SENT

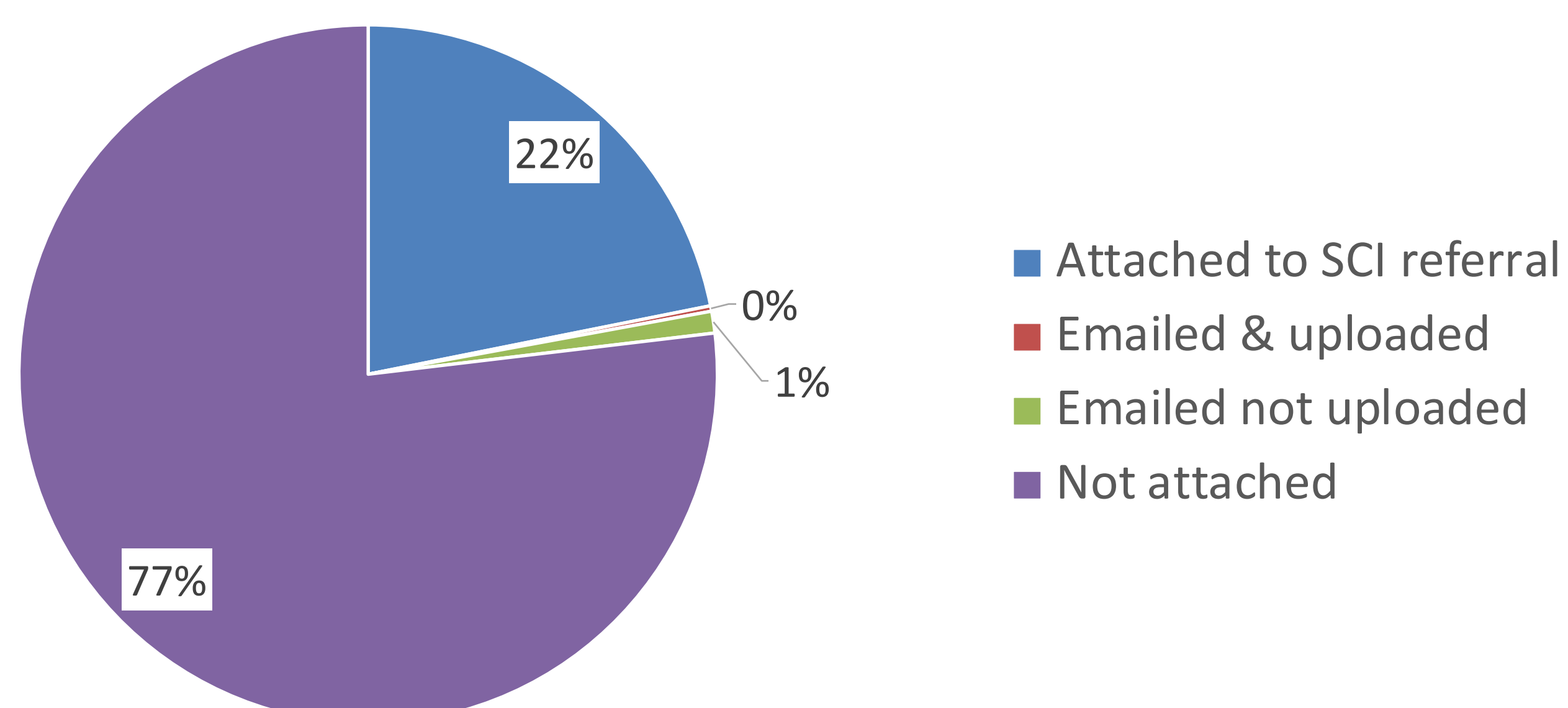


Figure 1

D&G Dermatology department received 398 SCI-gateway referrals in Aug 2019 and 290 referrals in 2020, after exclusion (26 from each month).

Photo attachments: In Aug 2019, 87 of 398 (22%) had photos attached to SCI-referrals and 199 of 290 (69%) in Aug 2020. Some referrals stated that they sent photos via email to the department which were/were not uploaded to the clinical portal yet at the time of analysis. This determined if they were counted in the photo quality assessment. 5 referrals had photos sent through email in Aug 2019, of which only 1 was uploaded and accessible for photo quality analysis. In Aug 2020, 8 were sent in via email and 4 were uploaded to clinical portal and counted in photo quality analysis. (See Figure 1 and 2)

Photo quality: Out of the photos sent and available to assess, 21 (24%) photos were of poor quality, 25 (29%) were acceptable and 41 (47%) photos were of excellent quality in Aug 2019. These changed to 59 (29%) poor, 61 (30%) acceptable and 83 (41%) photos of excellent quality in Aug 2020.

AUGUST 2020 REFERRALS: PHOTOS SENT

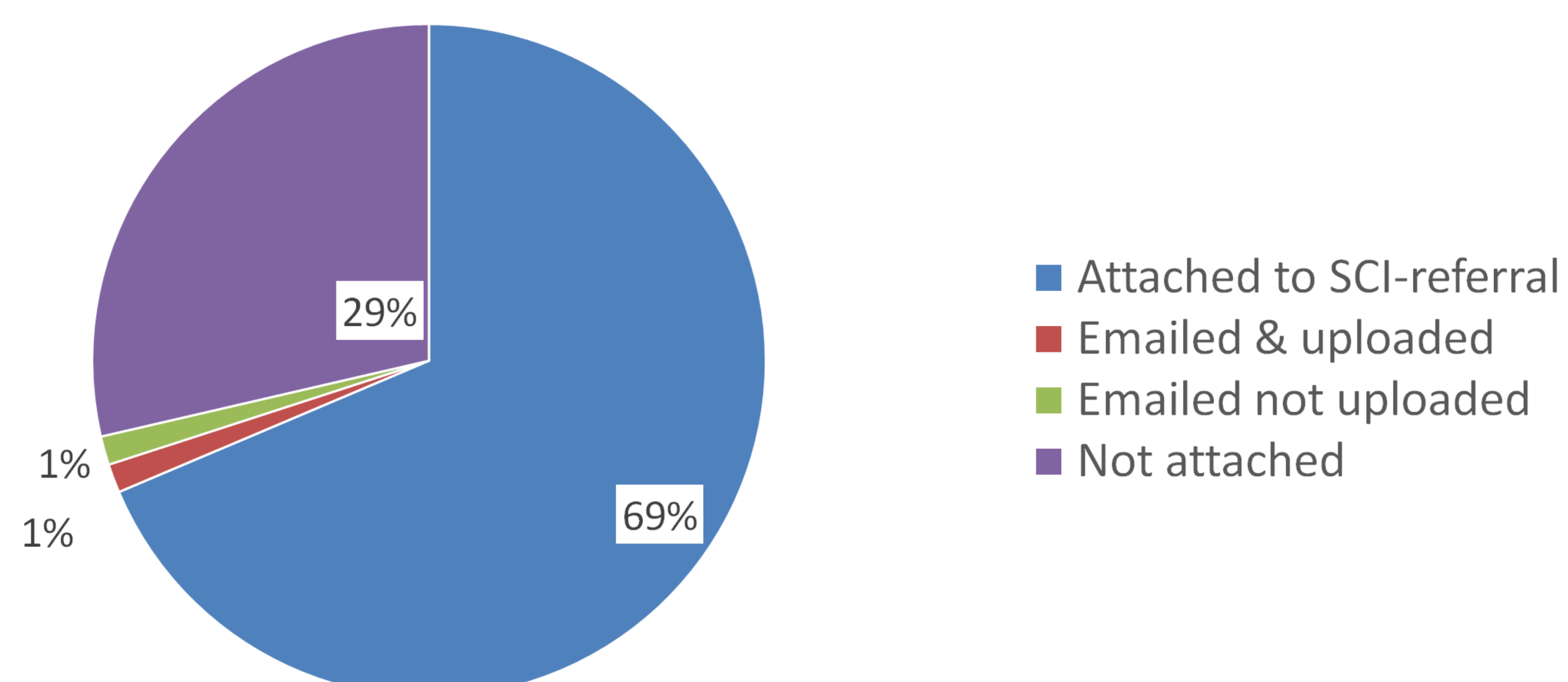


Figure 2

QUALITY OF PHOTOS SENT

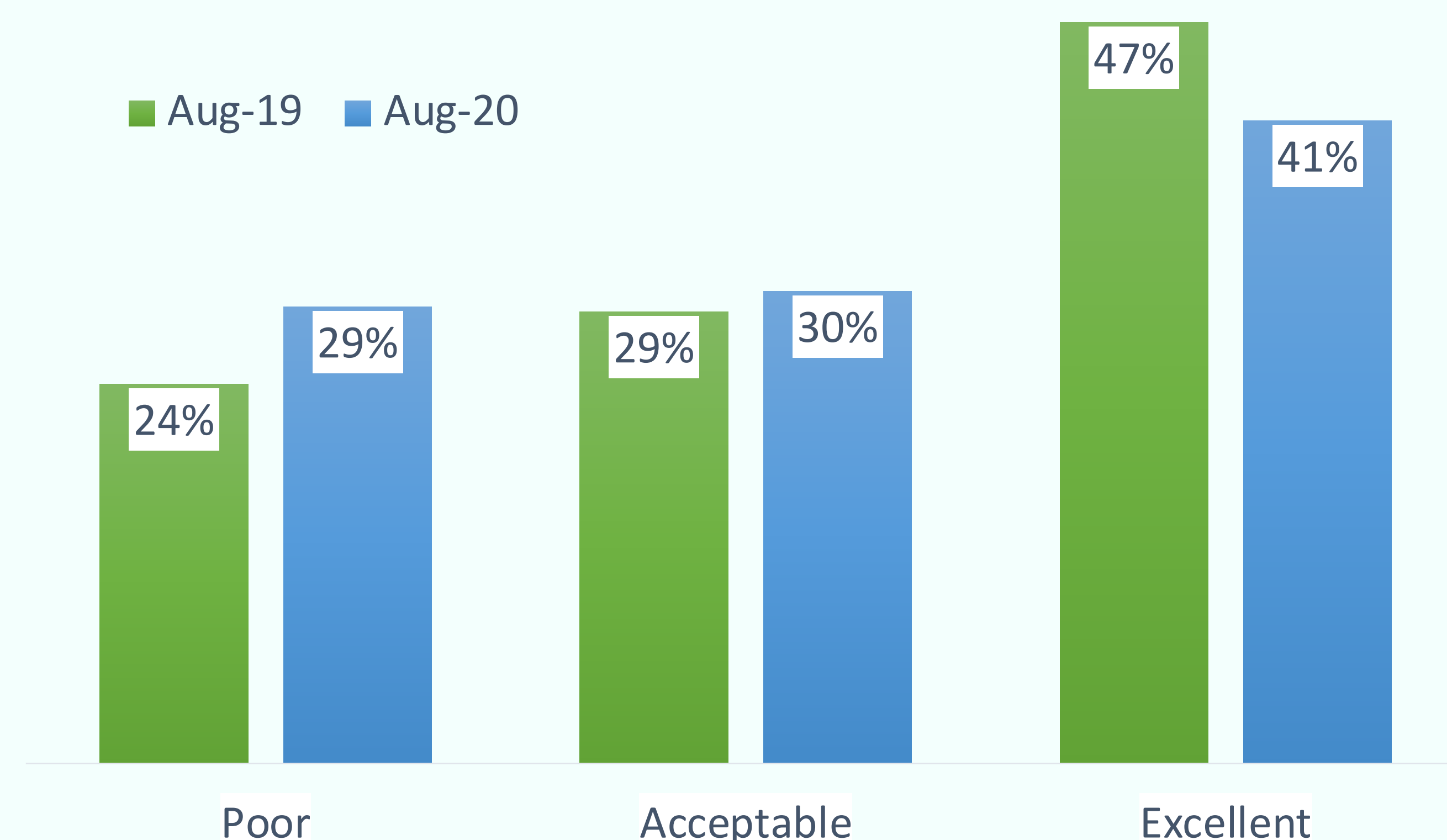


Figure 3

CONCLUSION

- Overall, the percentage of referrals send with photos to the D&G Dermatology service has more than doubled within a year. However, a significant number of these still lacks photos.
- Additionally, just under half of the photos sent each year were of excellent quality, while around a quarter were of poor quality.
- This has highlighted the importance of focusing on the quality of images sent. The benefits of using photos are only as good as the quality of the photos sent. We need to aim for a clear, focused photo with ample lighting. There needs to be an increased awareness of the need of good quality images and how to take the right photos.
- The pandemic has given extra impetus to the Dermatology Service's drive to increase awareness within the community of attaching images to their referrals. This will help increase the efficiency of the service; quicken the advice and guidance process for our GPs and improve patient journey.

Acknowledgements: Adam Elliott, Prof Chris Isles

References: 1 NOTP%20Tele dermatology%20Roadmap%20202021%20v10%20FINAL.pdf 2 http://www.appgs.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/APPGSDCE_Audit_of_Dermatology_Coverage2019.pdf 3 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/publication/third-phase-response/>