

Not Your Average Check-Up: Diagnosing UK HealthCare Physician Assistant Scope of Practice

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INTRODUCTION

The Physician Assistant (PA) profession has continued to evolve over the last five decades since its creation in the 1960s.¹ Until March 2020, PAs in Kentucky were legally bound to outdated laws that blocked prescriptive authority of any controlled substance in the state.² With the expanding scope of practice (SOP) laws, we pondered what Kentucky PAs were doing in practice, compared to what the legislation, or law, states. In today's healthcare system, advanced practice providers are the future of medicine.³ The expansion of the scope of practice for PAs in Kentucky should, in turn, lead to a larger supply of advanced providers that there is currently such a high demand to give quality and patient centered care.^{4,5,6}

PURPOSE OF STUDY

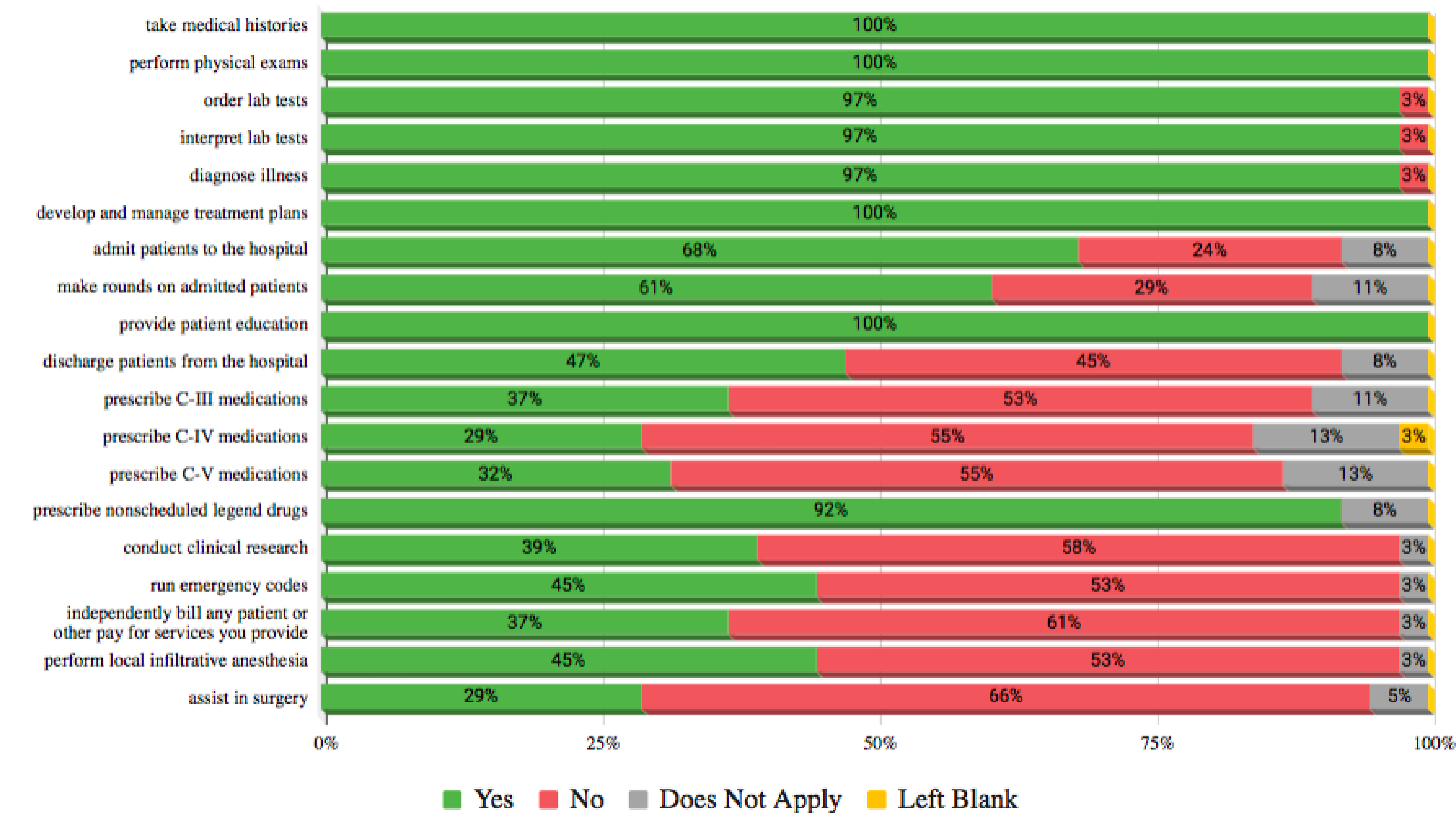
The purpose of this study was to understand the reality of the scope of practice PAs have at a specific institution in Kentucky, compared to the amount allotted via state legislation by observing PA autonomy, knowledge and perspective.

METHODS

A 19 item Qualtrics survey was emailed to 102 Physician Assistants at UK HealthCare, via the Advanced Practice Provider Listserv. Analysis of previous studies, state legislation and national directives by the American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA) shaped the questionnaire to inquire about scope of practice in three main categories: demographics, general scope of practice, and legislation. The survey included inquiry into daily tasks performed, familiarity with scope of practice legislation in Kentucky, supervising physician protocols, and specialty data. The survey concluded after 28 days. Findings from the study were analyzed through Microsoft Excel and linear regression statistics using SPSS.

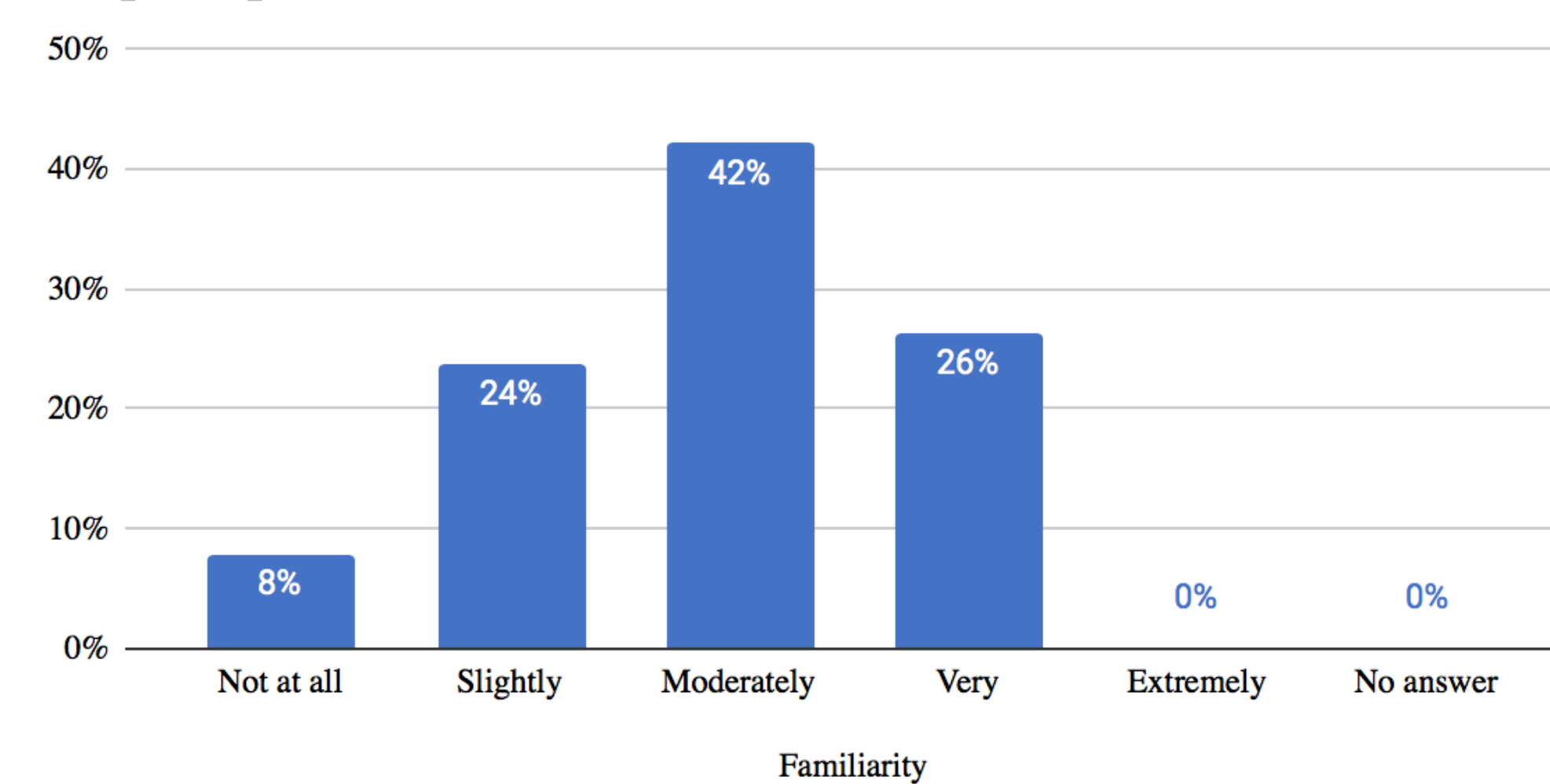
RESULTS

Graph 1. Scope of Practice (General) per AAPA Guidelines



Graph 1 is an overview of the 38 respondents' scope of practice by task, which were selected from an issue brief published by AAPA and the researchers of this study. From their answers here, each respondent was given a Scope Of Practice (SOP) score to quantify their answers.

Graph 4: Familiarity with the Kentucky legislation regarding PA scope of practice



Graphs 4 and 5 highlight that while the majority (68%) of PAs reported they were "moderately" or "very" familiar with KY legislation regarding PA scope of practice, only 21% had ever legally updated their scope of practice in an application from their supervising physician to the Kentucky Board of Medical Licensure (KBML). Similarly, 58% of respondents reported they knew the protocol to change their scope of practice, and 77% reported they were either "very" or "extremely" comfortable with speaking with their supervising physician about legally updating their scope of practice. Yet the 21% of those who have remains much lower.

Table 1: Regression Data			
Regressions	P value	R	R2
Comfort level Speaking to Supervising Physician vs. SOP Score	0.069	0.298	0.89
Knowledge of Protocol to Change Scope of Practice vs. SOP Score	0.127	0.252	0.064
Familiarity with Kentucky PA Legislation vs. SOP Score	0.813	0.04	0.002
Whether or not Scope of Practice has been updated vs. SOP Score	0.401	0.14	0.02

Graph 5: Has your current supervising physician ever updated your scope of practice?

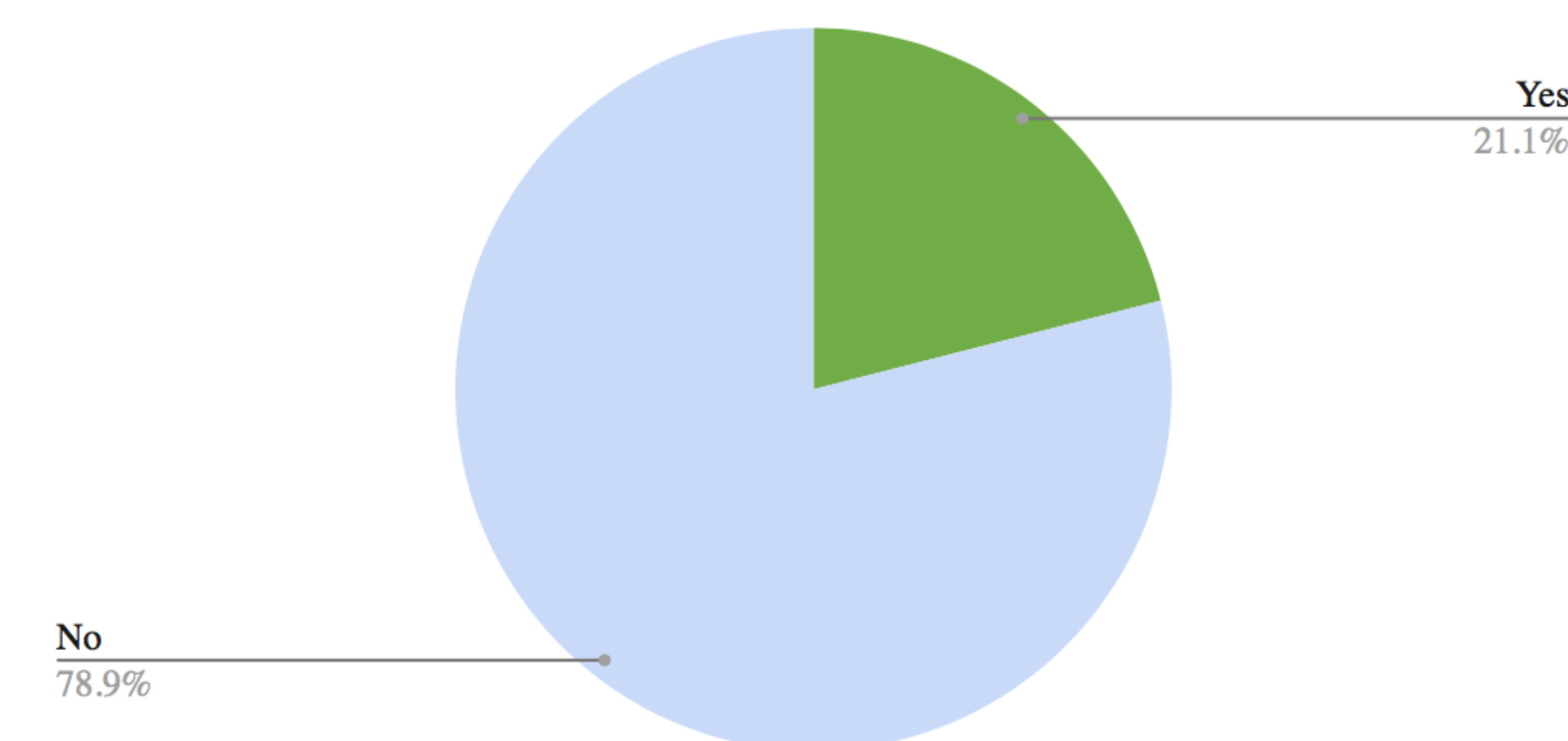


Table 1 is a report of the statistical data generated from regression analysis of legislative factors vs. the respondents' SOP score. However, no correlation or statistical significance was evident among these items.

DISCUSSION

The conductors of this study, as University of Kentucky PA students, desired to know the limitations, if any, and benefits of our future profession. The research found the capacity and reality of what PAs at UK HealthCare can do and, in contrast, how much duties vary based on specialty and supervising physician. A study of this design has not been conducted before. The literature and research prior only measured the level of content and satisfaction PAs felt. The results of this study cannot tell us how other institutions, universities, cities and states compare. Additionally, the survey was sent out for only about a month's time, the survey was electronic, and was sent to a nonspecific Advanced Practice Provider Listserv. This research study was student-run with potential overlap of professors who also work as PAs at UK HealthCare. Future studies may inquire about SOP for PAs compared to other universities, or overall on a state level. Perspective and data from supervising physicians and administration could also be examined. This study has certainly created a new area of research to explore further.

KEY FINDINGS

- All UK HealthCare PAs take medical histories, perform physician exams and develop and manage treatment plans, regardless of their specialty.
- Despite all PAs having the same title, day-to-day duties vary greatly between specialties.
- Scope of practice at UK HealthCare widely depends on the specialty and supervising physician preferences.
- Scope of practice for PAs at UK HealthCare does not correlate with comfort of speaking with the supervising physician, knowledge of changing the protocol, familiarity with KY legislation, nor if the scope of practice has been updated

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