# 2024 Freelance Medical Communicator Tools of the Trade Survey

# Report of Raw Results for Distribution to Survey Participants

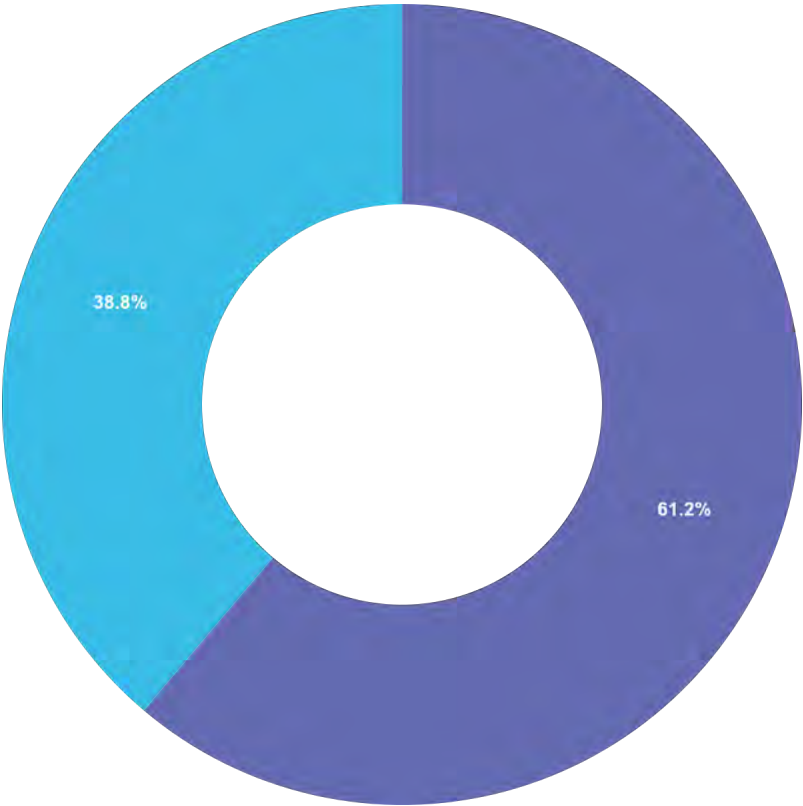**Survey running dates:** 18 January - 1 March, 2024

**Report date:** 12 March 2024

**Prepared by:** Monica Nicosia, PhD, Nicosia Medical Writer LLC;

monica@nicosiamedicalwriter.com

## Nicosia
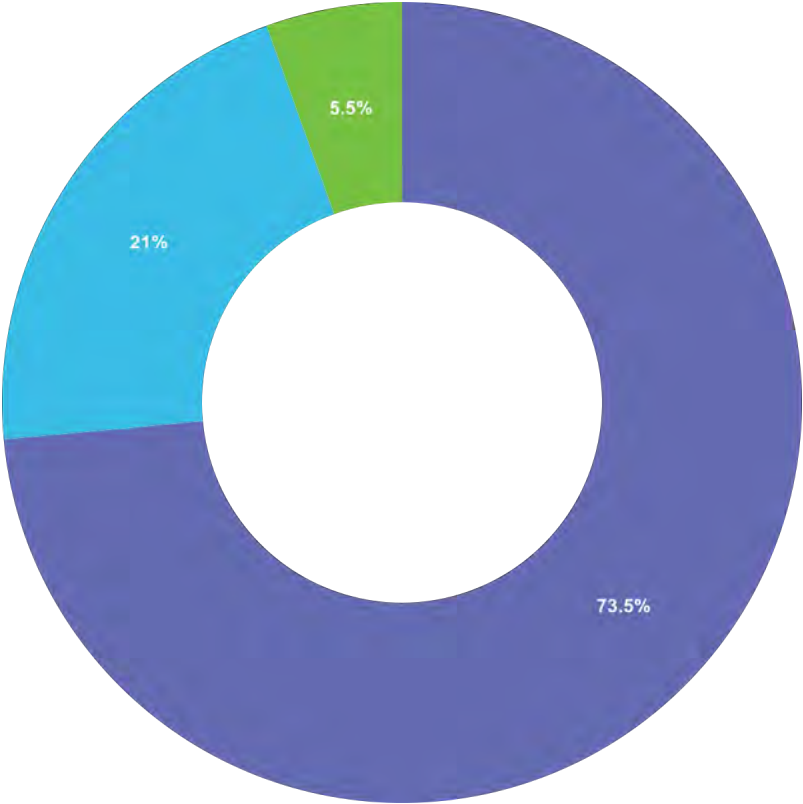### MEDICAL WRITER
Well-written, fact-checked, on-target, on-time content

**Q1** Work History Questions

How would you describe your work status as a freelance medical communicator?*



38.8%

61.2%

**Answered:** 291     **Unanswered:** 0

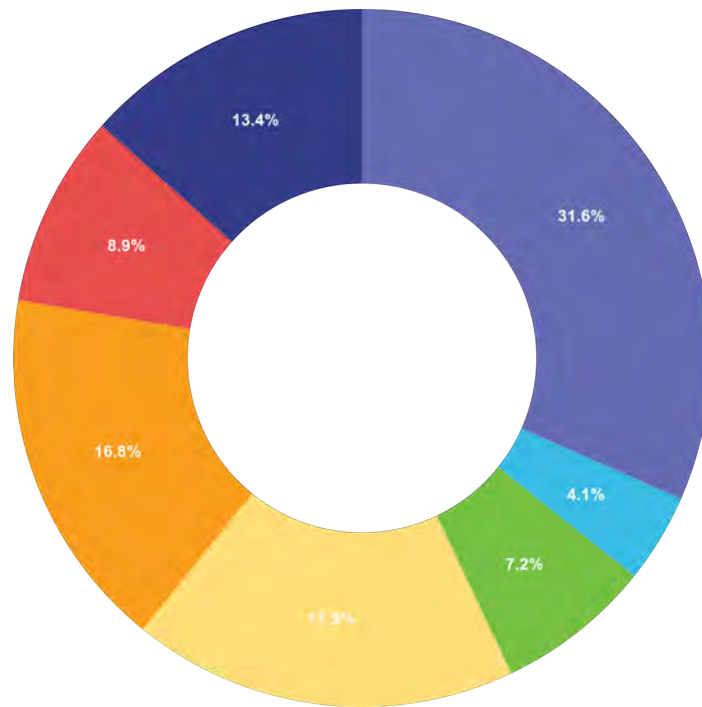| Choice | Total |
|---|---|
| Full-time | 178 |
| Part-time | 113 |

**Q2** What is your primary function (>50% of your billable hours) as a freelance medical communicator?*



**Answered:** 291   **Unanswered:** 0

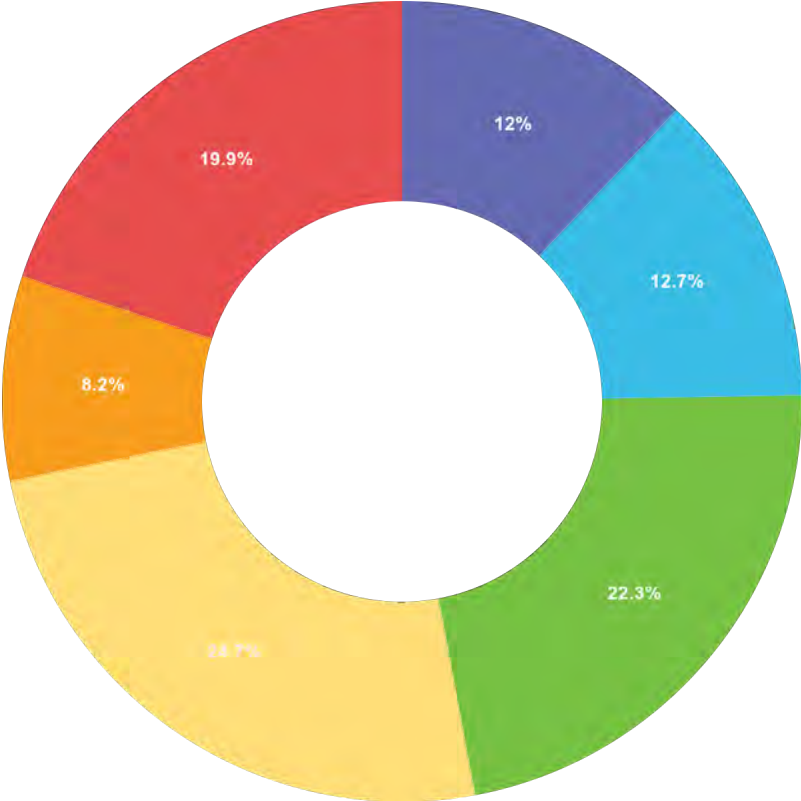| | Choice | Total |
|---|---|---|
| 🟣 | Writer | 214 |
| 🔵 | Editor | 61 |
| 🟢 | Other (Fill in the blank.) | 16 |

**Q3** How many **total years** were you employed as a medical communicator before going freelance?*



**Answered:** 291    **Unanswered:** 0

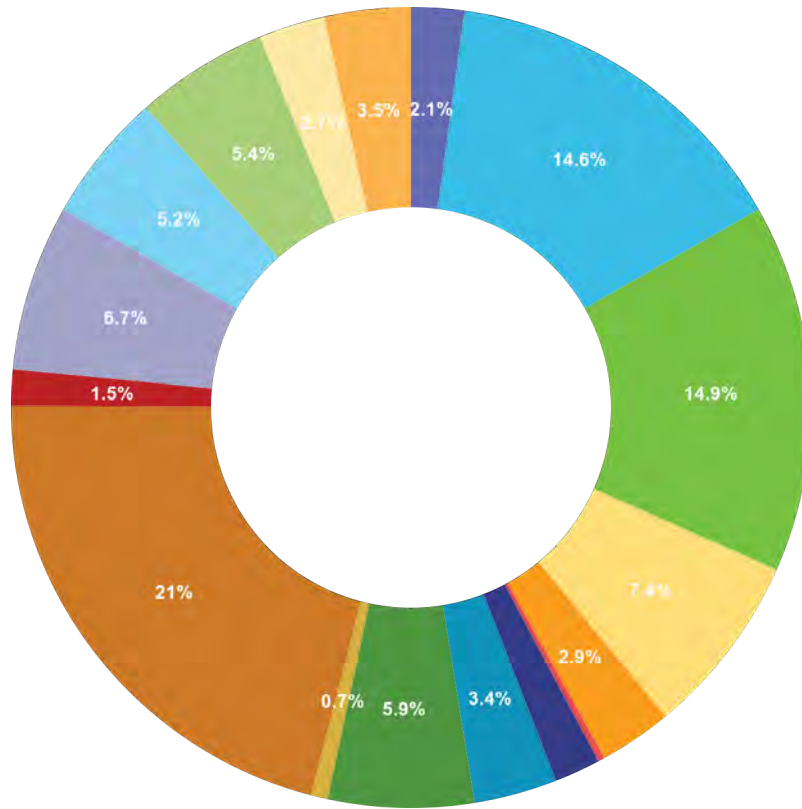| Choice | Total |
| --- | --- |
| None | 92 |
| <1 | 12 |
| 1-2 | 21 |
| 3-5 | 52 |
| 6-10 | 49 |
| 11-15 | 26 |
| 16+ | 39 |

**Q4** How many **total years** have you worked as a **freelance** medical communicator?*



**Answered:** 291   **Unanswered:** 0

| Choice | Total |
|---|---|
| <1 | 35 |
| 1-2 | 37 |
| 2-5 | 65 |
| 6-10 | 72 |
| 11-15 | 24 |
| 16+ | 58 |

**Q5** Which of the following are your top 1-3 areas of freelance medical communications work? (Select up to 3.)*



**Answered:** 291    **Unanswered:** 0

| Choice | Total |
| --- | --- |
| 🟣 Books | 16 |
| 🔵 Continuing education for healthcare professionals (medical, nursing, pharmacy, allied health) | 109 |
| 🟢 Conference abstracts, posters, slide decks | 111 |
| 🟡 Educational materials for patients and caregivers | 55 |
| 🟠 Grants | 22 |

| Choice | Total |
|---|---|
| 🔴 Grey literature | 2 |
| 🔵 Health economics and outcomes research (HEOR) | 14 |
| 🔵 Health and/or science journalism for lay audiences | 25 |
| 🟢 Health and/or science journalism for professional audiences | 44 |
| 🟡 Health technology assesssment (HTA) | 5 |
| 🟠 Manuscripts for peer-reviewed publications | 157 |
| 🔴 Materials for hospitals and/or health insurance companies | 11 |
| 🟣 Promotional materials (for clinicians, allied health, payers, etc) | 50 |
| 🔵 Regulatory documents (eg, clinical study reports, NDAs, protocols) | 39 |
| 🟢 Sales training materials | 40 |
| 🟡 White papers | 20 |
| 🟠 Other (Fill in the blank.) | 26 |

**Q6** Which operating system does your main business computer use?*
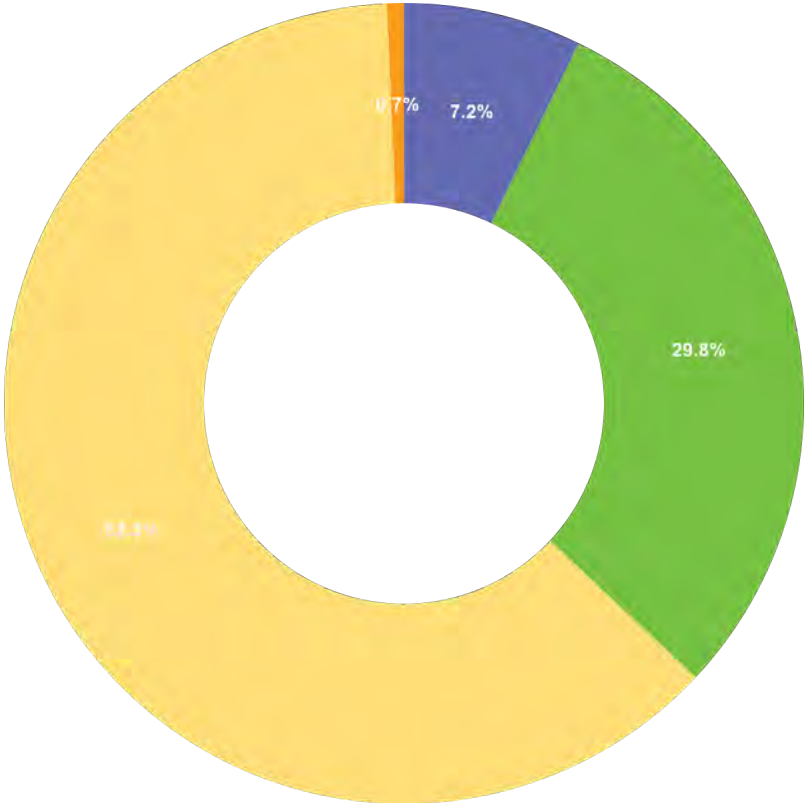


**Answered:** 291    **Unanswered:** 0

| | Choice | Total |
|---|---|---|
| 🟣 | Google ChromeOS | 21 |
| 🔵 | Linux | 0 |
| 🟢 | Mac OS | 87 |
| 🟡 | Microsoft Windows | 182 |
| 🟠 | Other | 2 |

**Q7** How do you back up your work computer? (Select all that apply.)*
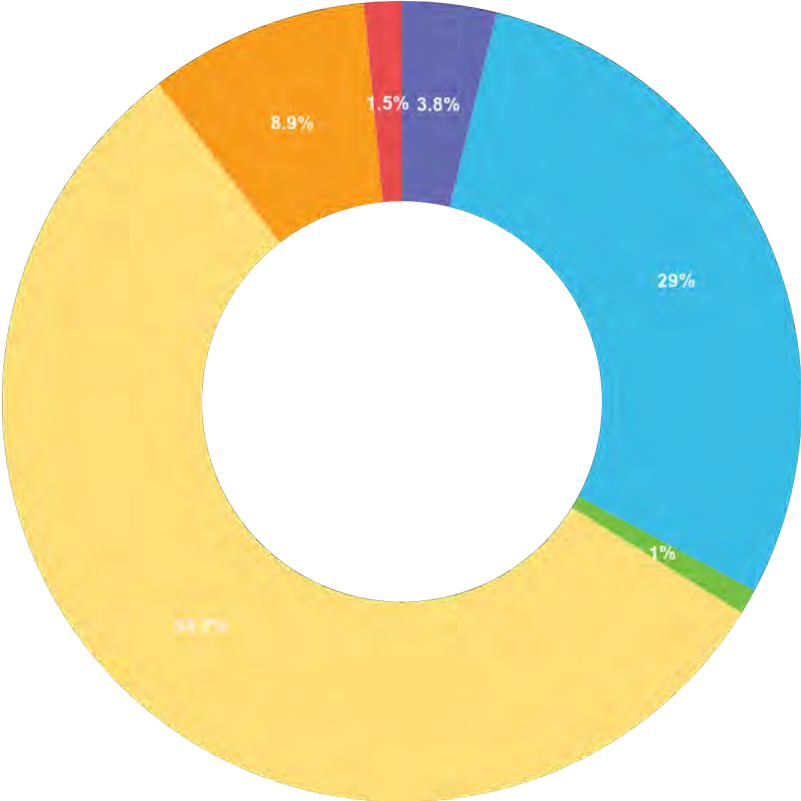


**Answered:** 291   **Unanswered:** 0

| | Choice | Total |
|---|---|---|
| 🟣 | No back up | 15 |
| 🔵 | External hard-drive | 114 |
| 🟢 | External NAS or RAID storage | 4 |
| 🟡 | Online/cloud-based service | 219 |
| 🟠 | Flash drive/USB keys/sticks | 35 |
| 🔴 | Other (Fill in the blank.) | 6 |

**Q8** Which online/cloud-based service do you use to back up your computer?*
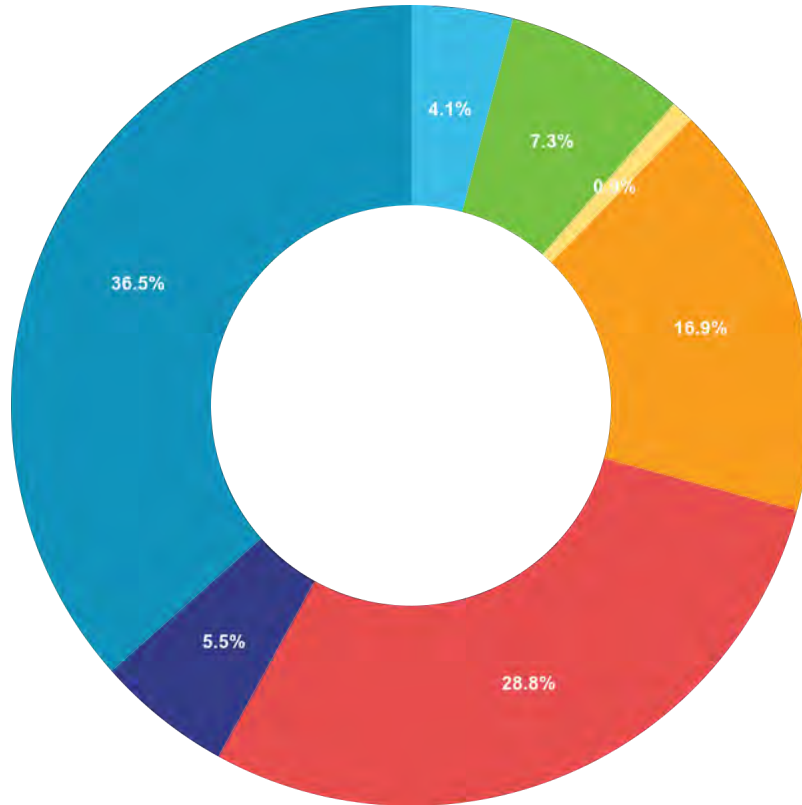


**Answered:** 219    **Unanswered:** 72

| Choice | Total |
|---|---|
| Acronis | 0 |
| Backblaze | 9 |
| Carbonite | 16 |
| CrashPlan | 2 |
| Dropbox | 37 |
| Google Drive | 63 |
| IDrive | 12 |
| Other (Fill in the blank.) | 80 |

**Q9** Do you have a business website?*



44%

56%
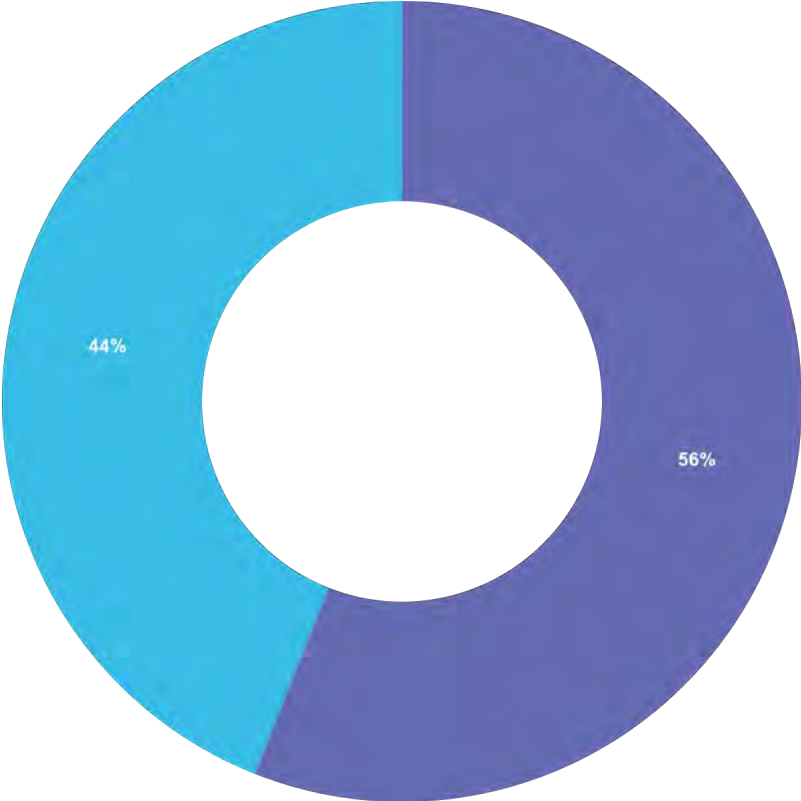
**Answered:** 291   **Unanswered:** 0

| Choice | Total |
|--------|-------|
| ● Yes | 163 |
| ● No | 128 |

**Q10** Who designed your website?*
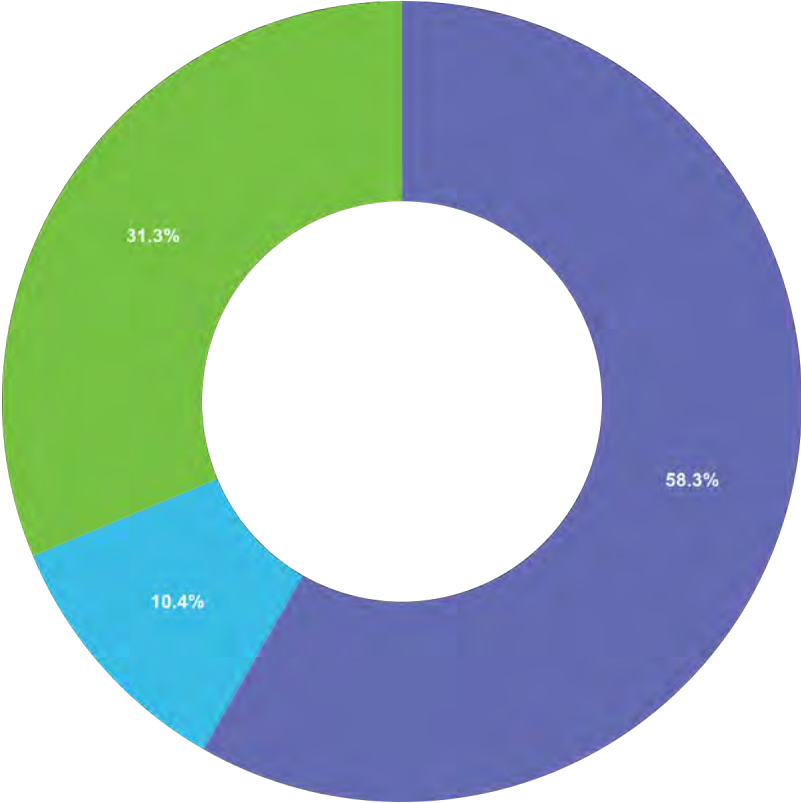


**Answered:** 163    **Unanswered:** 128

| Choice | Total |
|---|---|
| I designed it myself | 95 |
| A relative/friend designed it at no charge | 17 |
| I paid someone to design it | 51 |

**Q11** Which website builder/host service do you use for your website?*
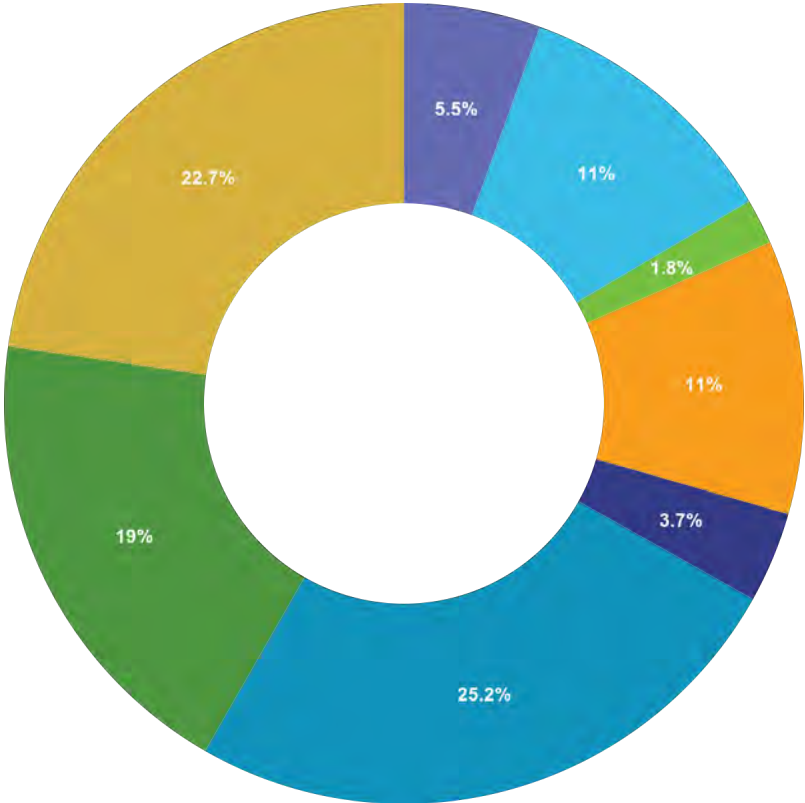


**Answered:** 163    **Unanswered:** 128

| Choice | | Total |
|---|---|---|
| 🟣 | Bluehost | 9 |
| 🔵 | GoDaddy | 18 |
| 🟢 | HostGator | 3 |
| 🟡 | Nexcess | 0 |
| 🟠 | Squarespace | 18 |
| 🔴 | Web.com | 0 |

| Choice | Total |
|---|---|
| ● Weebly | 6 |
| ● Wix | 41 |
| ● WordPress | 31 |
| ● Other (Fill in the blank.) | 37 |

**Q12** Do you use any software/app for accounting/bookkeeping?*

51.2%　48.8%
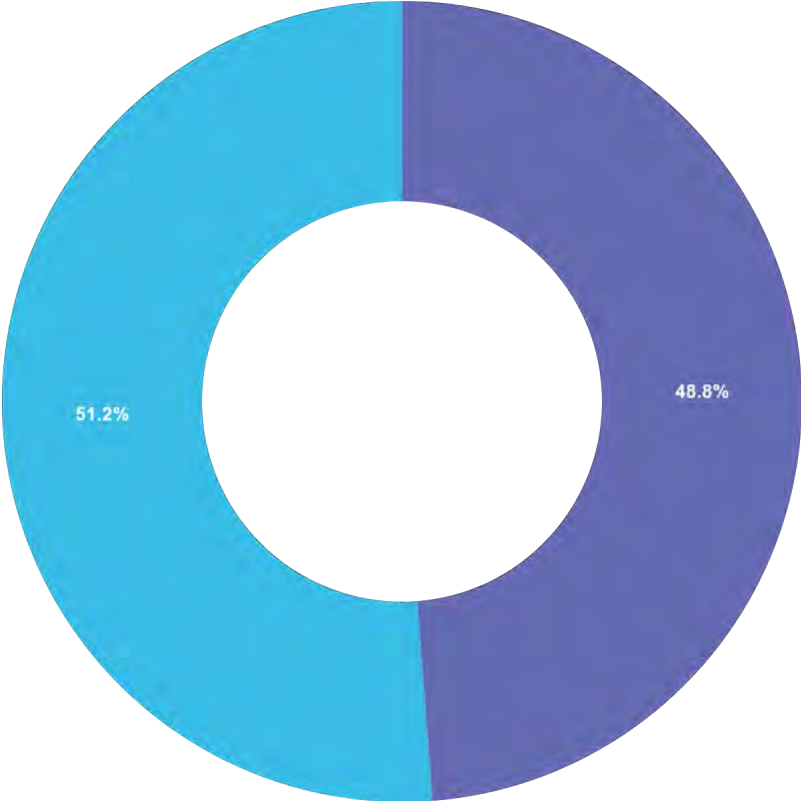
**Answered:** 291　**Unanswered:** 0

| Choice | Total |
|--------|-------|
| ● Yes | 142 |
| ● No | 149 |

**Q13** Which software/app do you use for accounting/bookkeeping? (Select up to 3.)*
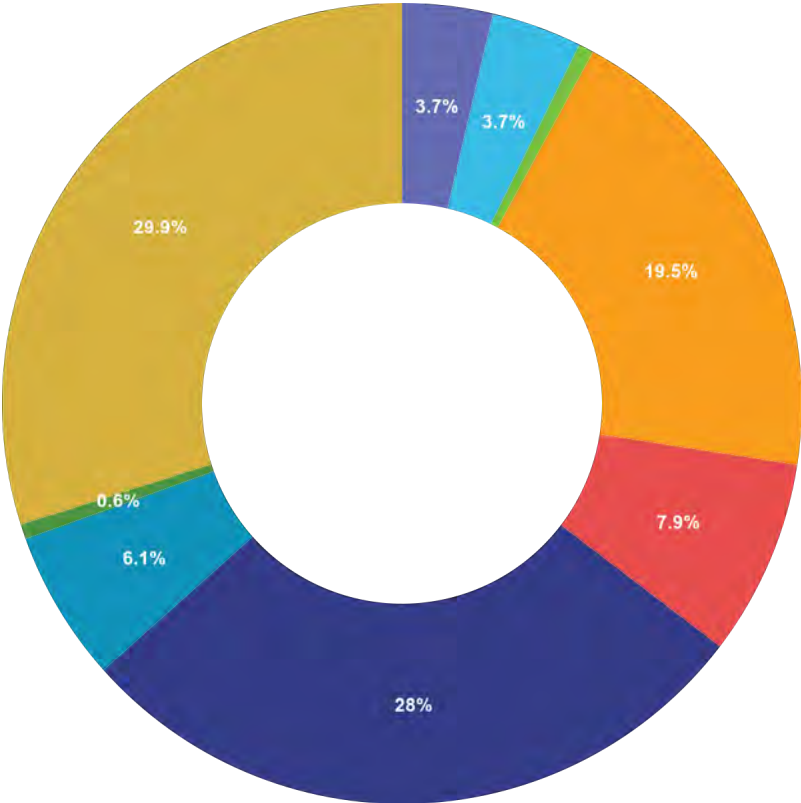


**Answered:** 142    **Unanswered:** 149

| | Choice | Total |
|---|---|---|
| 🟣 | FreeAgent | 6 |
| 🔵 | FreshBooks | 6 |
| 🟢 | GoDaddy Bookkeeping | 1 |
| 🟡 | Moxie | 0 |
| 🟠 | QuickBooks Self-Employed | 32 |
| 🔴 | Quicken | 13 |

| Choice | Total |
|---|---|
| 🔵 Spreadsheet (eg, Excel, Google Sheets, Numbers) | 46 |
| 🔵 Wave | 10 |
| 🟢 ZipBooks | 1 |
| 🟡 Other (Fill in the blank.) | 49 |

**Q14** Do you use any software/app for time tracking?*
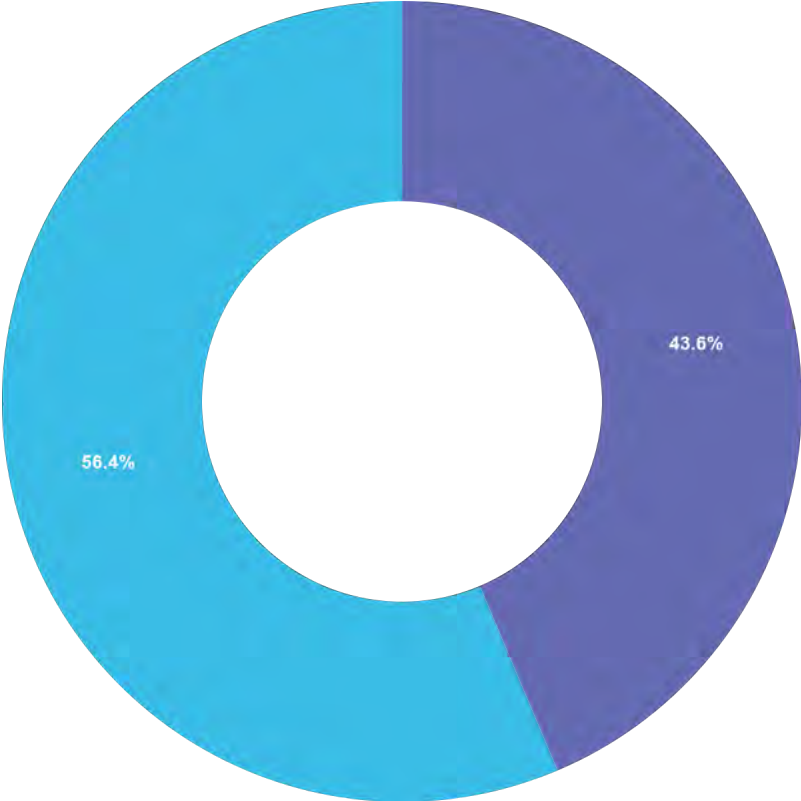


**Answered:** 291    **Unanswered:** 0

| Choice | Total |
|--------|-------|
| Yes | 127 |
| No | 164 |

**Q15** Which software/app do you use for time tracking?*
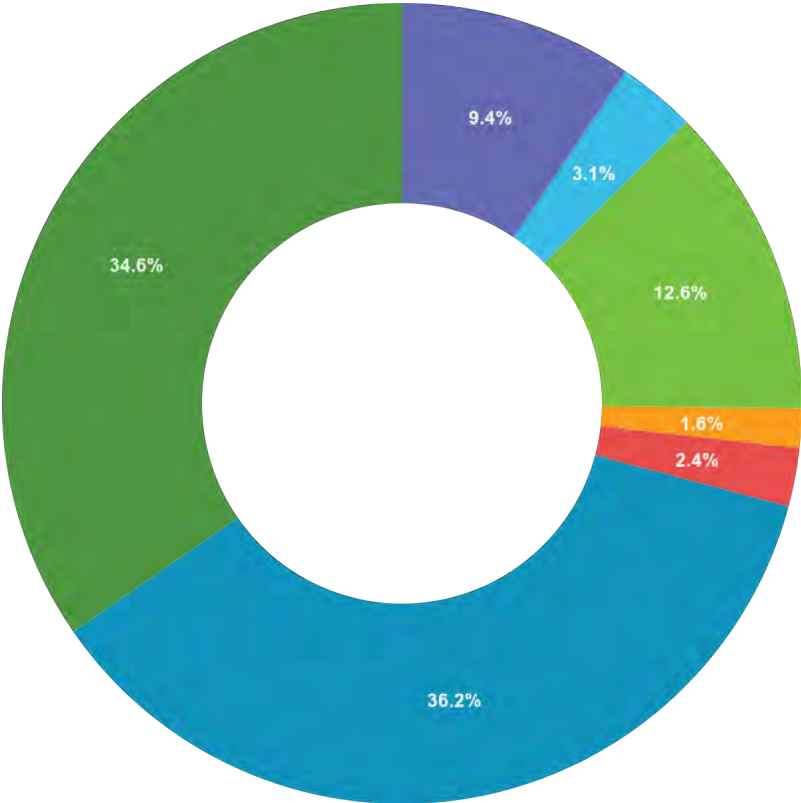


**Answered:** 127    **Unanswered:** 164

| Choice | Total |
|---|---|
| Clockify | 12 |
| FreshBooks | 4 |
| Harvest | 16 |
| HoneyBook | 0 |
| My Hours | 2 |
| Paymo | 3 |

| Choice | Total |
|---|---|
| RescueTime | 0 |
| Toggl | 46 |
| Other (Fill in the blank.) | 44 |

**Q16** Do you use any software/app for project management?*



31.6%

68.4%
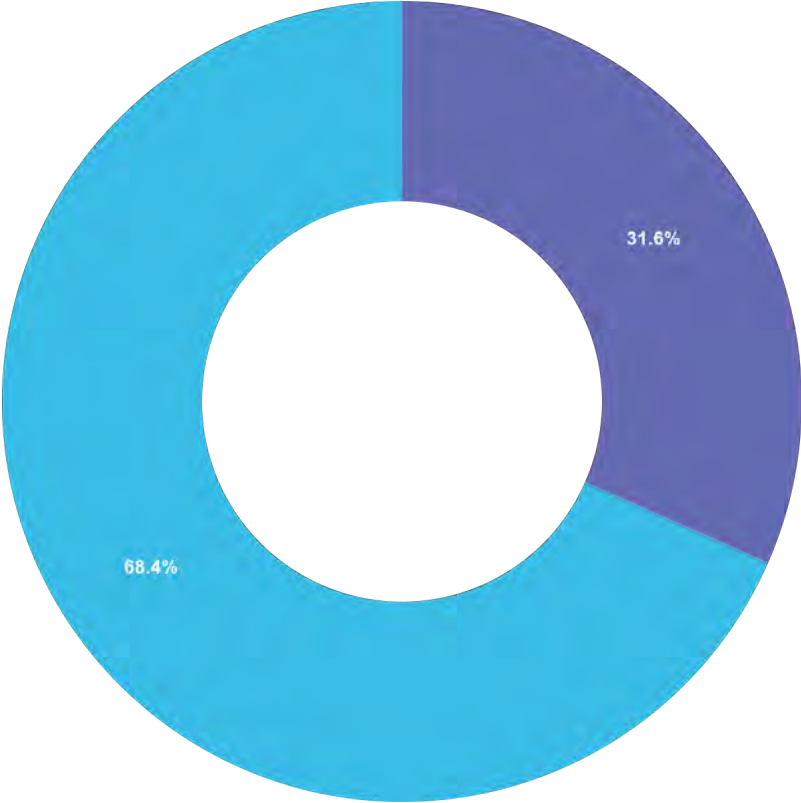
**Answered:** 291    **Unanswered:** 0

| Choice | Total |
|--------|-------|
| 🟣 Yes | 92 |
| 🔵 No | 199 |

**Q17** Which software/app do you use for project management? (Select up to 3.)*



18.3%

6.4%

2.8%

18.3%

3.7%

50.5%
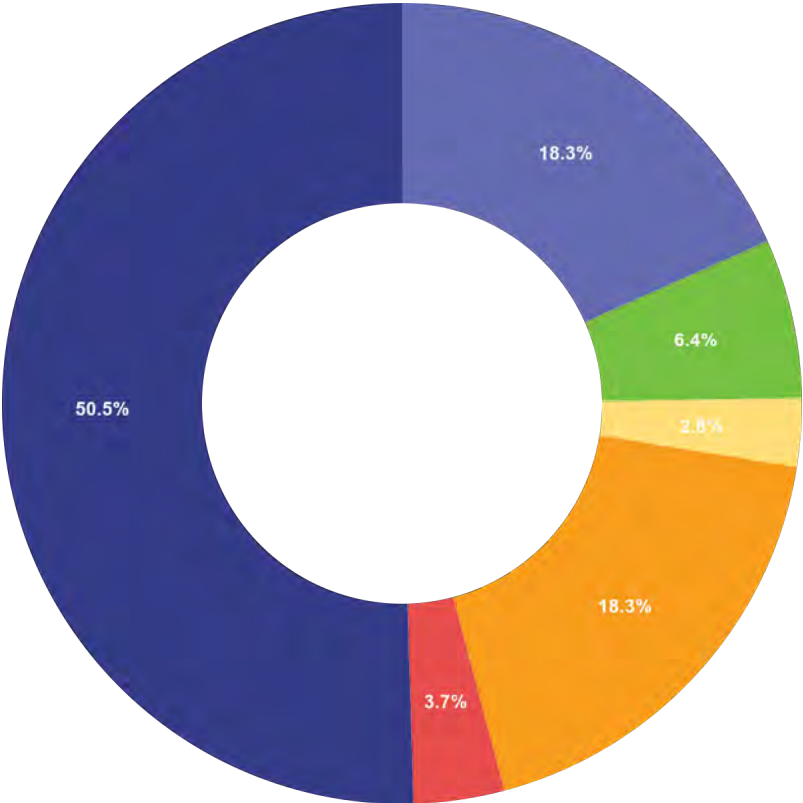
**Answered:** 92    **Unanswered:** 199

| Choice | Total |
|---|---|
| Asana | 20 |
| Bonsai | 0 |
| ClickUp | 7 |
| Paymo | 3 |
| Trello | 20 |
| Zoho | 4 |
| Other (Fill in the blank.) | 55 |

**Q18** Do you use any citation/reference management software/app for your medical writing or editing work?*



35.1%

64.9%
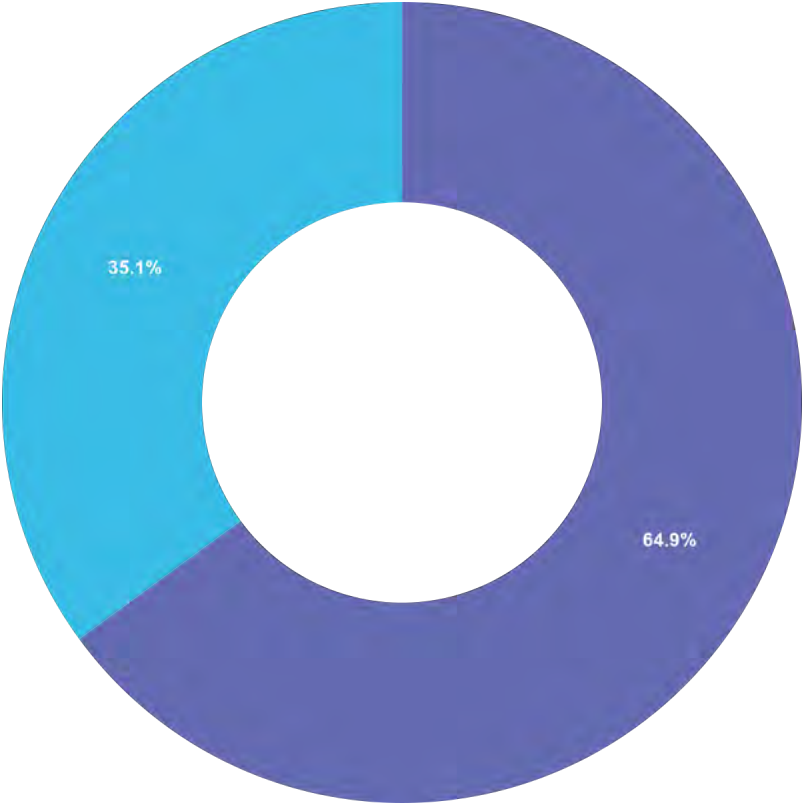
**Answered:** 291    **Unanswered:** 0

| Choice | Total |
|---|---|
| Yes | 189 |
| No | 102 |

**Q19** Which citation/reference management software/app do you use for your medical writing or editing work? (Select all that apply.)*
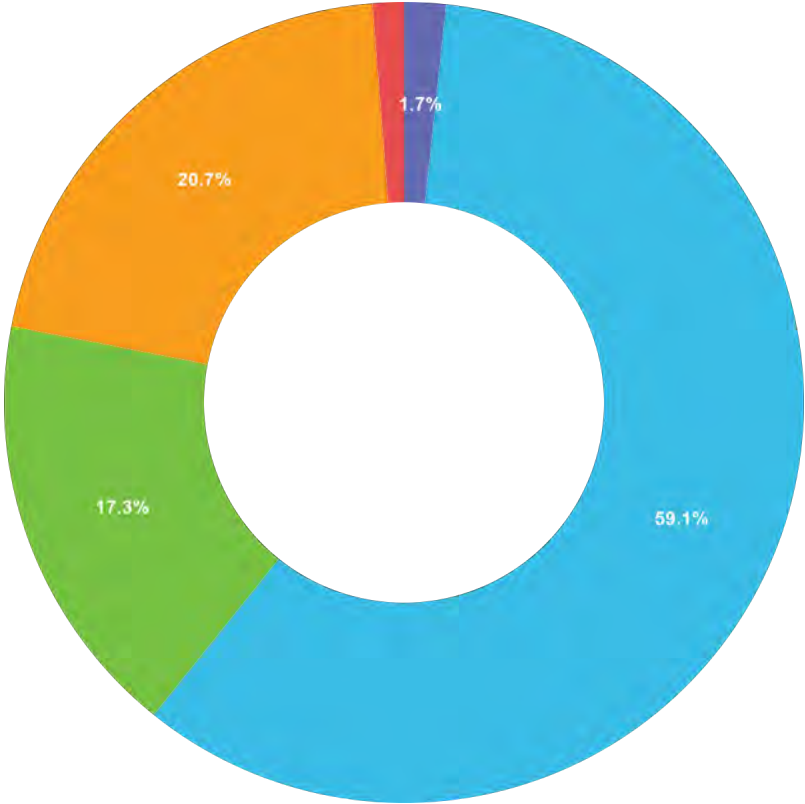


**Answered:** 189    **Unanswered:** 102

| Choice | Total |
|--------|-------|
| ● Edifix | 4 |
| ● EndNote | 140 |
| ● Mendeley | 41 |
| ● Paperpile | 0 |
| ● Zotero | 49 |
| ● Other (Fill in the blank.) | 3 |

**Q20** Which antivirus/anti-malware app/software provider(s) do you use? (Select all that apply.)*
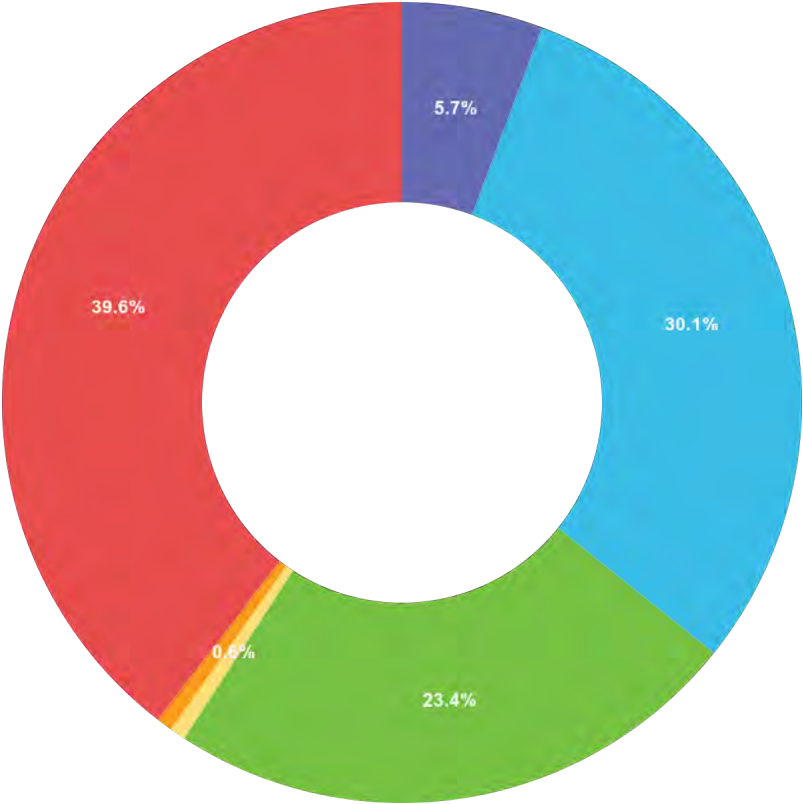


**Answered:** 291     **Unanswered:** 0

| Choice | Total |
|---|---|
| Bitdefender | 18 |
| McAfee | 95 |
| Norton | 74 |
| Surfshark | 2 |
| TotalAv | 2 |
| Other | 125 |

**Q21** Other than MS Word, PowerPoint, Outlook, and Excel, which software/apps would you recommend to your fellow medical communicators? (Select all that apply.)*
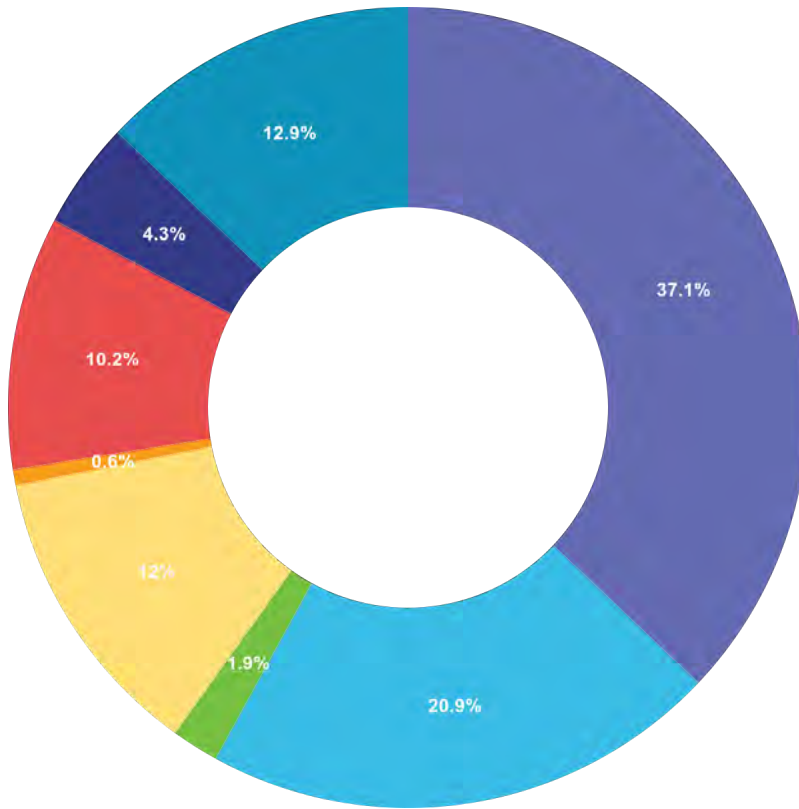


**Answered:** 291    **Unanswered:** 0

| | Choice | Total |
|---|---|---|
| ● | Adobe Acrobat | 232 |
| ● | EndNote | 131 |
| ● | Evernote | 12 |
| ● | Perfect It | 75 |
| ● | Scrivener | 4 |

| Choice | Total |
|---|---|
| 🔴 Stedman's Online Medical Dictionary | 64 |
| 🔵 Taber's Medical Dictionary Online | 27 |
| 🔵 Other (Fill in the blank.) | 81 |

**Q22** Have you used ChatGPT or other generative artificial intelligence (AI) apps for any of your medical writing or editing work?*



41.6%

58.4%
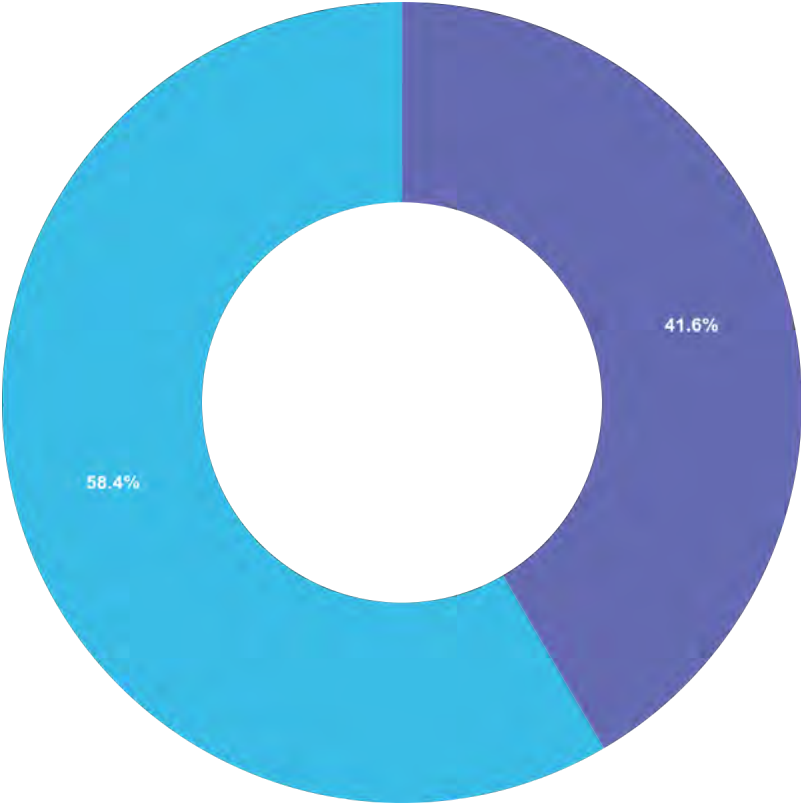
**Answered:** 291    **Unanswered:** 0

| Choice | Total |
|---|---|
| ● Yes | 121 |
| ● No | 170 |

**Q23** Which generative AI apps have you used for any of your medical writing/editing work? (Select all that apply.)*
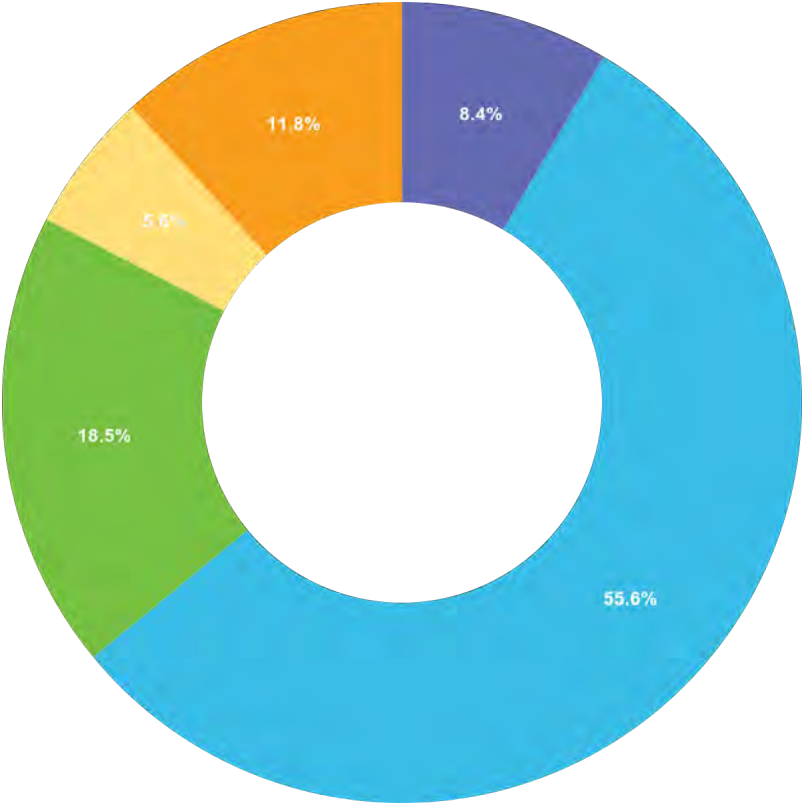


**Answered:** 121    **Unanswered:** 170

| | Choice | Total |
|---|---|---|
| ● | Bard (from Google) | 15 |
| ● | ChatGPT (from OpenAI) | 99 |
| ● | Copilot (from Bing) | 33 |
| ● | Dall-E (from OpenAI) | 10 |
| ● | Other (Fill in the blank.) | 21 |

**Q24** How have you used generative AI apps for any of your medical writing/editing work? (Select all that apply.)*



**Answered:** 121    **Unanswered:** 170

| | Choice | Total |
|---|---|---|
| 🟣 | Research | 64 |
| 🔵 | Edit and/or rewrite content | 52 |
| 🟢 | Paraphrase published text | 38 |
| 🟡 | Write content for professional audience | 14 |
| 🟠 | Write content for lay audience | 22 |

**Q25** Please briefly answer the following optional questions based on your experience using generative AI apps in your medical writing/editing work.
Form

| What are the advantages of using a generative AI app in your medical writing/editing work? | What are the disadvantages of using a generative AI app in your medical writing/editing? |
|---|---|
| A quick overview of a new area provides a context saves time. | One must assume there are errors and it is not current and take it for what it is. |
| Content outlines | Accuracy |
| It just gets my writing process started. It gives me some ideas to get going with, then I take it in the direction I need or want to go, to add my own style, make it less generic/flat, and to ensure appropriate citations are integrated. | -blank- |
| Put author list in alphabetical order by last name - it saved time | Have to be very clear with prompts |
| Can help when you're stuck or tired or not sure what to do | Everything needs to be checked, so not sure how much time it's saving. |

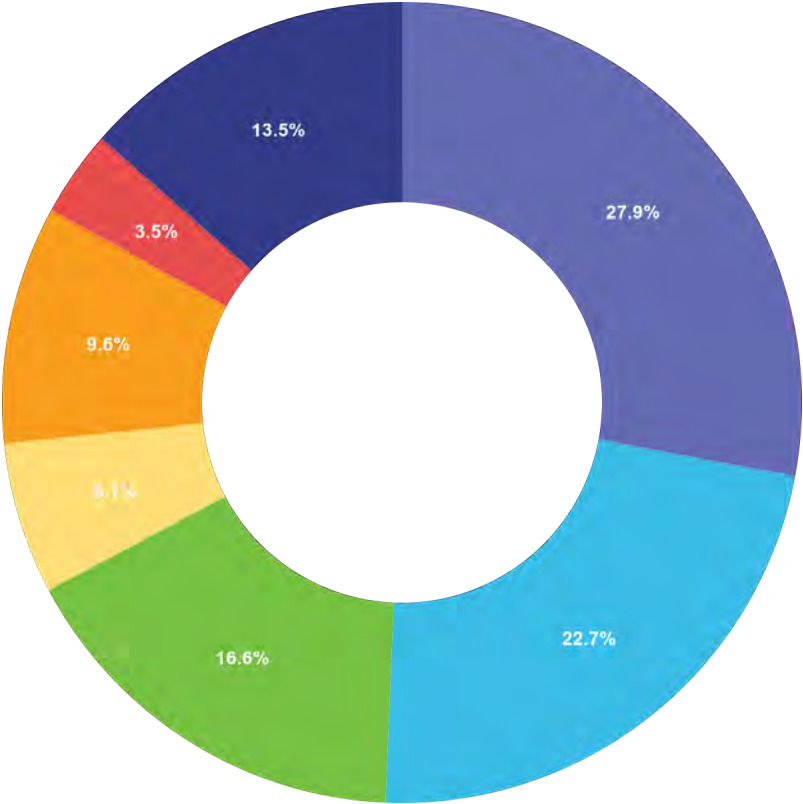| What are the advantages of using a generative AI app in your medical writing/editing work? | What are the disadvantages of using a generative AI app in your medical writing/editing? |
|---|---|
| Saves time | Need to check for accuracy |
| Eliminate redundancies; help paraphrase clinical data | Does not always accurately capture language/medical writing nuances; requires clinical and copywriting to ensure accuracy |
| It gives a good idea to build on | -blank- |
| It enhances and simplifies the work further | When prompt is not specific and elaborated, the results are not.accurate. |
| Saves time. | Monotonous sentences. |
| It helps with brainstorming at times, and getting my throughts into actual words. | It can be repetative or have incorrect information. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Conversational | Not always accurate or using the best resources when providing answers |
| Saves time with rewrites, paraphrasing and grammar checks. | Sometimes you get so used to it that we go to AI for every small edit and don't use our brains anymore. |
| Helps me phrase things - sometimes just to give me ideas and can be useful as a sounding board. | It sometimes only works within a restricted framework , according to what I asked it - i.e. it can't quite make the leap to what I need. Can also contradict itself, especially when using it for more demanding tasks. |
| Time saving | Plagarism, poor quality work, references not correctly cited |
| It can quickly summarize and paraphrase. | The language is generic and repetitive. |
| tightens and shortens my text, which tends to run long | I feel like it is a cop out |
| quick research, bibliographies | errors, cliches, low-level writing |
| Efficient tool for background research | -blank- |
| Quick fact checking and background research | Having to verify results |
| The ability to occasionally rewrite sentences. | -blank- |
| Quickly rephrase and/or simplify sentences | I would not trust entering confidential info in free AI apps |
| Saves time | It does not always provide helpful answers |
| can simplify complex language | nuances are lost |

| What are the advantages of using a generative AI app in your medical writing/editing work? | What are the disadvantages of using a generative AI app in your medical writing/editing? |
|---|---|
| speed | accuracy, lack of trusted fact-check/annotation/referencing |
| it helps summarize, organize, and develop ideas when creating an initial draft. It is a good assistant tool | limited use |

| | |
|---|---|
| It's fast to provide insights/answers | Not always trustworthy or helpful; sometimes it removes details that are neccessary for differentiating ideas |
| saves time | I personally can't trust, doesn't show that human touch and thought process in any writings. |
| More efficient research | Incorrect information, hallucinations |
| Time saving | Some information might be wrong |
| None for actual medical writing work | It takes longer to fact check and rewrite than it would have taken to research and write in the first place. It's like a flakey intern with a limited skillset who you can't even trust to make the same mistakes consistently. |
| none- it is confidently inaccurate and cant answer questions I posed | it is confidently inaccurate and cant answer questions I posed, I am currently writing an article on advances and risks -but only providing examples- not article writing |
| Getting ideas for themes, titles, but I'm usually using it as a jumping off point | It usually sucks |
| It's fast and can help me get started with basic notes, outline, or a place to start researching. | So far they don't integrate super smoothly with MS Word and the content isn't top quality. It definitely won't replace actual research and writing - it's more of a note taking app for me. |
| Generative AI apps can expedite medical writing/editing by offering quick access to relevant literature, generating summaries, and suggesting improvements, thus enhancing productivity and accuracy in the medical writing process. | The disadvantages of using a generative AI app in medical writing/editing work include the potential for inaccuracies, lack of domain-specific knowledge, and ethical concerns regarding patient privacy and data security. |
| A way to quickly find information regarding an unfamiliar topic | There is still a need to verify references given by an AI app and likely more references needed to be found using traditional searches. |
| Helps get ideas on paper faster. | Can become a crutch |
| Suggests ideas you may not have thought of including | Information is wrong or inappropriate |
| Helps give a starting point when I am stuck for what to write | 1. Lack of accuracy 2. Sometimes strings words together in more of a word salad than something that actually has meaning |
| Quick | Repetitive and hallucinatory |

| What are the advantages of using a generative AI app in your medical writing/editing work? | What are the disadvantages of using a generative AI app in your medical writing/editing? |
|---|---|
| Faster research | Not entirely accurate or precise |
| Get ideas on plain language / lower literacy ways to say things | -blank- |
| Faster research | Data leak to gpt models |
| ideas generation and starting point for relevant refs to use | occasionally takes longer than just doing it myself; the app doesn't always fully understand my query (yet) |
| It gives me a starting point when looking for applicable research papers. I still check and source all the original research myself, but at least now I know where to look. | It can take up to three to four prompts before I get what I'm looking for. It often goes off at a tangent and gives me information that is sort of relevant but not quite what I'm looking for |
| Get an overview of a new medical topic. | Not reliable references, missing information |
| Mainly help in content creation idea heading | Use different ideas and content other than necessary things |
| Brainstorming ideas, content strategy | It's sometimes inaccurate, can't trust completely |
| Great for idea generation, editing and getting menial work done quickly. | The copy is generated by AI is generally sub-par and requires so much editing that it's better to not use AI at all. |
| Inspiration, at times, and table creation | It fails me most times |
| Speed up some the outline of the writing, double check writing and editing | Lacks up to date accuracy |
| Useful for research to identify KOLs | Poor for referencing |
| Save time | Not accurate, can be repetitive, does not sound like a human (lacks emotion/real life experience) |
| Ideas and to overcome writers block | Confidentiality concerns |
| A quick tool to summarise a topic in not familiar with | Doesn't always provide me what I want. Perhaps I need training in prompts! |
| It's faster than me at rephrasing text. Better than Google at getting specific answers to questions | It's still not great at referencing |
| It's a great starting point and useful for word count. It gives a good framework to build upon. | Legal uncertainty. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Speeds up research | Inaccuracy |
| good for creative ideas generation | often have to double check scientific context is accurate |
| excellent at creating a first draft (get me started much faster), improve text quality, AI can propose alternatives and new ideas, and the Copilot paid subscription is totally confidential | I can't think of any disadvantages... I now cannot live without Copilot... it has significantly improved my productivity |

| What are the advantages of using a generative AI app in your medical writing/editing work? | What are the disadvantages of using a generative AI app in your medical writing/editing? |
|---|---|
| Speed and accuracy | Introducing new errors, security |
| It's fast | Hallucinations |
| Great for paraphrasing and idea generation | Takes time to data check |
| Faster idea generation and removing writer's block | AI written stuff needs to be edited for SEO and also the word choices that AI uses frequently. Cannot solely depend on the facts generated |
| They help a lot in quick writing. | Most of them are not oriented for medical writing. |
| Asking the AI to rephrase what I wrote is a nice check for meaning and flow | AI hallucination. Having to verify the answers provided by the AI |
| May help save time on a laborious task | Visability in what it's done. I would be particularly concerned about hallucinations concerning references |
| Saves time looking for topics | No reliable referencing |
| Time saving | Decreasing human resources |
| Review more papers faster | Can't trust the results, must check everything carefully |
| Helps summarise work, especially when there is a transcript to create a document. It needs to be matched with the transcript and slide deck though to ensure content is accurate. | It changes the meaning many times and cannot be trusted blindly. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Helps overcome writers block; helps me edit my own work and see errors | Hallucinations, repetitive and boring copy |
| Provide succinct answers to some questions, outline for new topics | No references, not much useful for technical work! |
| increased efficiency, decreased time doing tasks i dislike | I don't entirely trust it |
| may uncover untapped sources; identify research blindspots | everything needs to be factchecked by humans! |
| AI saves time and money by helping brainstorm/organize ideas and acting as an array of consultants at my fingertips. | Generic answers, can't introduce confidential client data, hallucinates references. |
| It stimulates ideas and speeds up the creative process | Unreliable/absent referencing |
| It is useful to bounce ideas around when you are working alone | You can only use it for projects that used published sources and can't put in any confidential information |
| Rapid ideas when I need help | -blank- |

| What are the advantages of using a generative AI app in your medical writing/editing work? | What are the disadvantages of using a generative AI app in your medical writing/editing? |
|---|---|
| different perspective on what I've written. helps with reducing overall word count. faster than using a thesaurus. helpful for plain language. I'm a better editor than writer, so running what I've written through AI gives me more material to edit to my heart's content. | still need to heavily edit to ensure message meaning is not lost. unintentional errors can slip through if relying too much on AI just to meet a deadline. AI will default to its in-built style guide so need to catch for AMA or house style. AI "voice" has no soul so content loses storytelling narrative. |
| Helps with mental/writer's block | not completely trust-worthy. risk of disclosing confidential information |
| It can help summarize and simplify content you provide. | I do not trust AI to provide 100% factual information so I rather do the research myself. |
| It helps me to get started on a project. | Too generic. |

| | |
|---|---|
| sometimes it is easier to edit than to write from scratch, so I would say I use it for "pump priming" | feels like cheating |
| It can quickly check my work for readability and grammatical mistakes. | You MUST double-check the validity of everything. |
| Good basic information for new projects | Must QC every citation/reference |
| none- it is confidently inaccurate and cant answer questions I posed | it is confidently inaccurate and cant answer questions I posed |
| Efficiency, can easily and quickly generate summaries | They are buggy and produce garbled and inaccurate text that needs careful checking and is sometimes useless |
| Quicker, helps spark new ideas | Inaccuracies, not good for large document writing because I have to go back and factcheck everything. I use for writing ideas but just sentences or small paragraphs at a time. |
| It speeds up the literature review process and the writing process. | When it doesn't work it can waste a lot of time. |
| Quickly reviews scores of papers | Inaccuracies, lack of citation in ChatGPT |
| Time saving | Cannot rely |
| Save time | Not confident it's accurate |
| It makes feel like I have a coworker I can bounce ideas off of. | Fact checking takes longer than writing myself |

Unanswered
**194**

Answered
**97**

**Q26 Demographic data**

How do you identify yourself?*
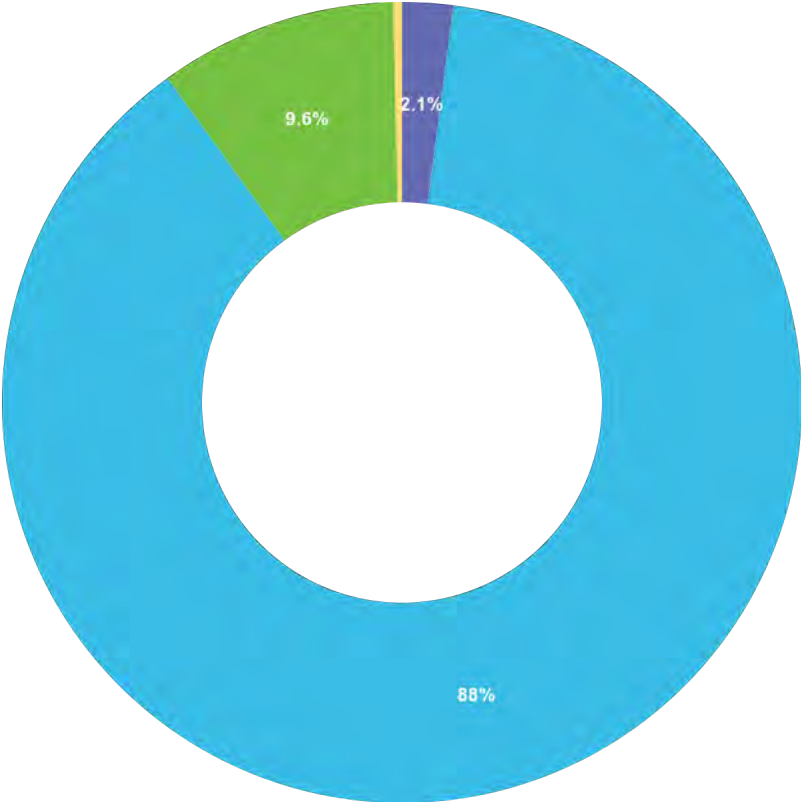


**Answered:** 291    **Unanswered:** 0

| Choice | Total |
|---|---|
| ● I don't want to answer this question | 6 |
| ● Female | 256 |
| ● Male | 28 |
| ● Nonbinary | 1 |
| ● Another gender idendity (Fill in the blank.) | 0 |

**Q27** How old are you?*
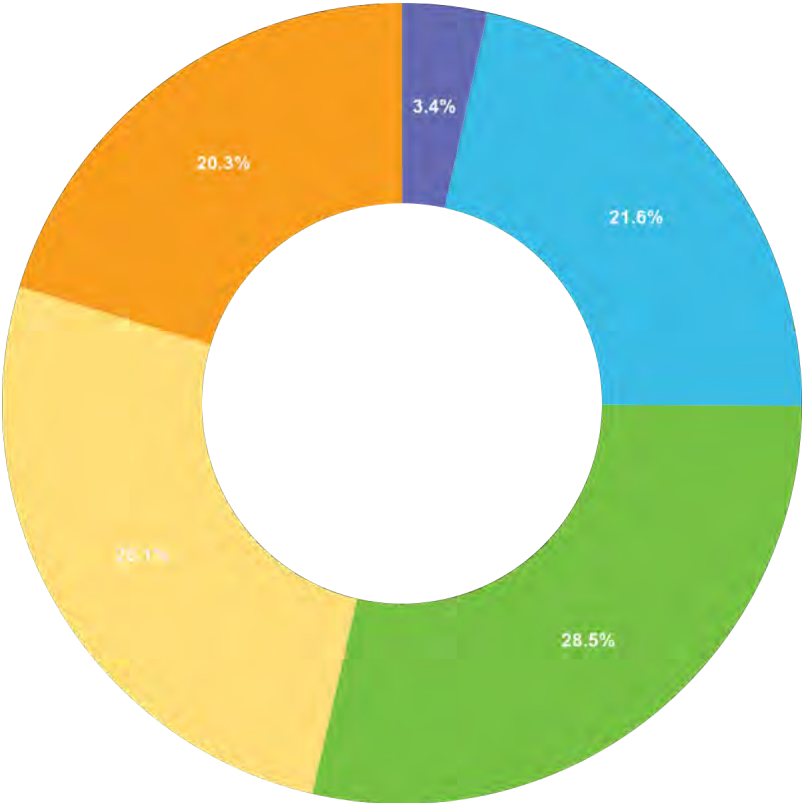


**Answered:** 291    **Unanswered:** 0

| Choice | | Total |
|---|---|---|
| 🟣 | 20-29 years | 10 |
| 🔵 | 30-39 years | 63 |
| 🟢 | 40-49 years | 83 |
| 🟡 | 50-59 years | 76 |
| 🟠 | 60 years or older | 59 |

**Q28** Where do you live?*
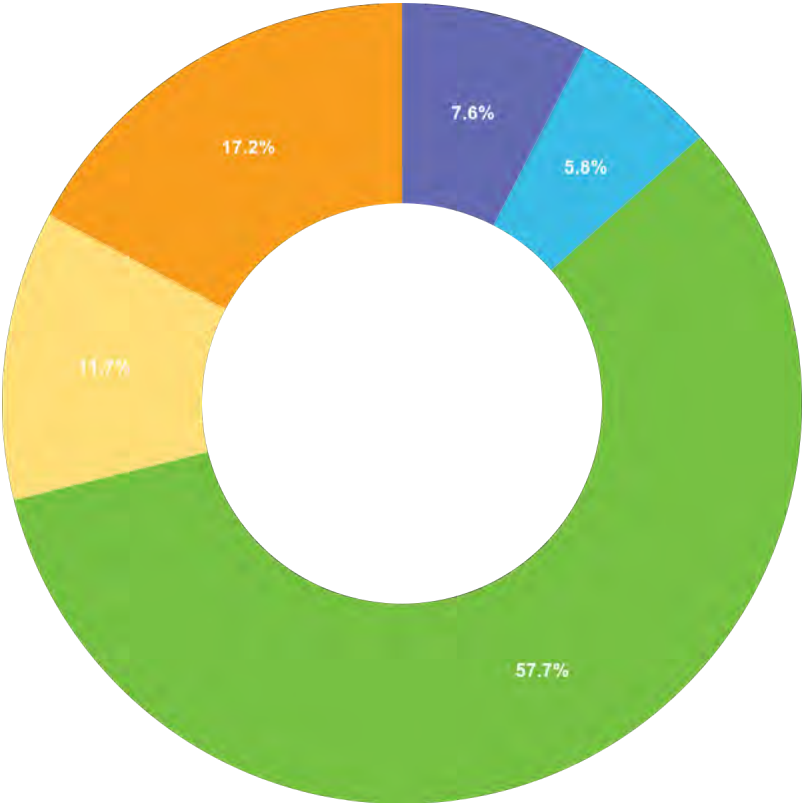


**Answered:** 291    **Unanswered:** 0

| | Choice | Total |
|---|---|---|
| ● | Canada | 22 |
| ● | India | 17 |
| ● | United States | 168 |
| ● | United Kingdom | 34 |
| ● | A country not listed  (Fill in the blank.) | 50 |

**Q29** What is/are your highest degree(s)? (Select up to 2.)*
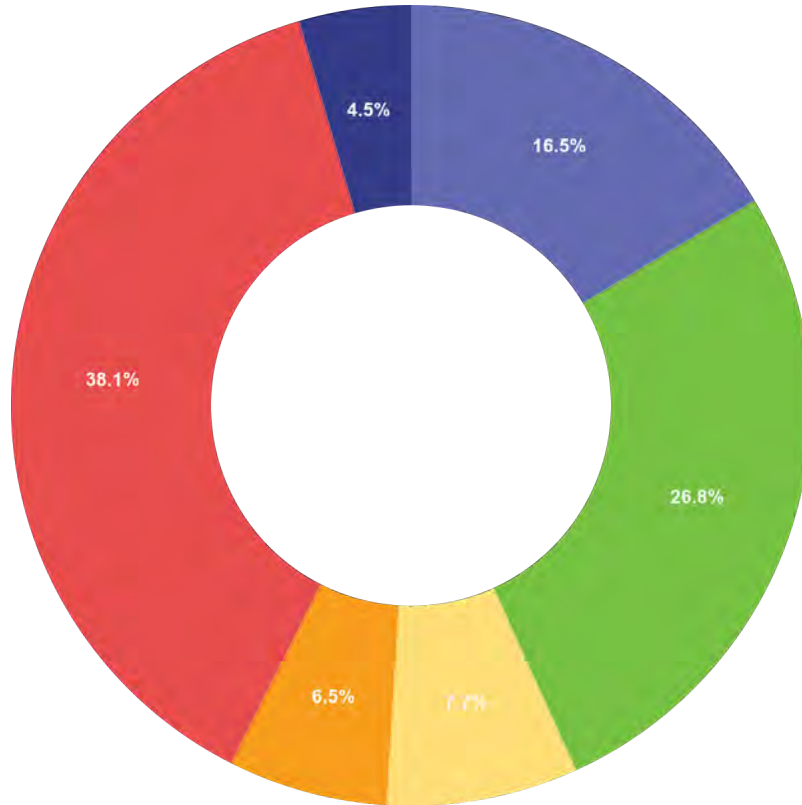


**Answered:** 291    **Unanswered:** 0

| | Choice | Total |
|---|---|---|
| 🟣 | BA, BS, BSN, or other first undergraduate degree | 51 |
| 🔵 | DNP (or other doctorate in nursing degree) | 0 |
| 🟢 | MA, MBA, MPhil, MS, MSN, or other master's degree | 83 |
| 🟡 | MD or DO (or other medical degree) | 24 |
| 🟠 | PharmD (or other doctorate in pharmacy degree) | 20 |
| 🔴 | PhD or other doctorate degree | 118 |
| 🔵 | Other (Fill in the blank.) | 14 |

**Q30** What is/are the general field(s) of your highest degree(s)? (Select all that apply.)*
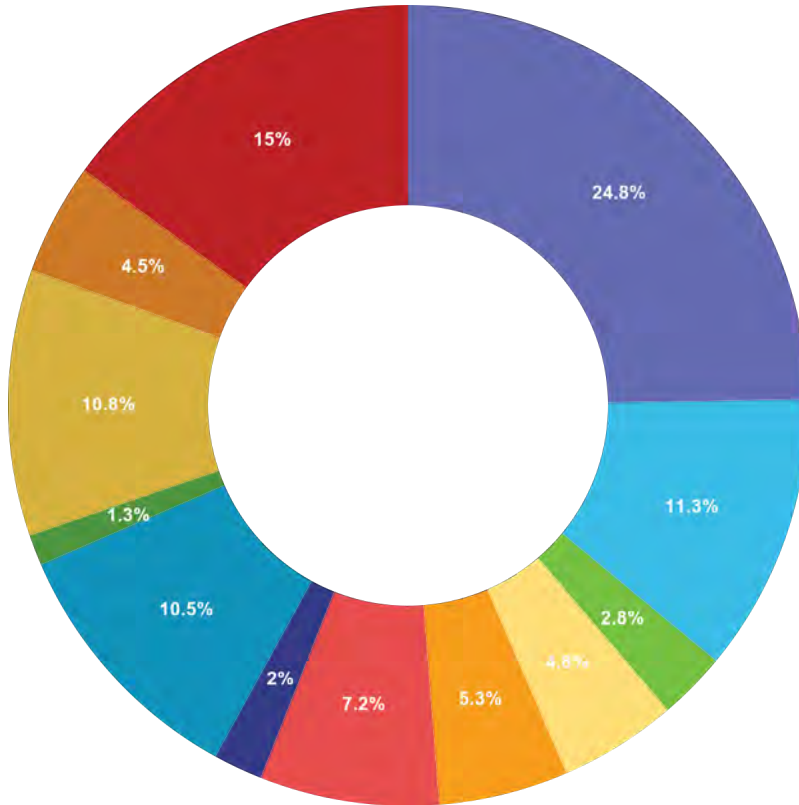


**Answered:** 291   **Unanswered:** 0

| Choice | Total |
|---|---|
| ● Biology | 99 |
| ● Biomedical/Medical/Science Writing | 45 |
| ● Business and/or Marketing | 11 |
| ● Chemistry | 19 |
| ● English and/or Literature | 21 |
| ● Health Sciences | 29 |

| Choice | Total |
|---|---|
| Journalism | 8 |
| Medicine | 42 |
| Nursing | 5 |
| Pharmacy, Pharmacology, and/or Toxicology | 43 |
| Public Health | 18 |
| Other (Fill in the blank.) | 60 |