

# The Pen is Mightier Than the Mouse

## Comparing Response Rates Between Paper and Electronic User Satisfaction Surveys

Laura Holloway: Lead Technician, Medicines Advice Service, University Hospitals Dorset NHS Foundation Trust

### Background:

The Medicines Advice Service (MAS) at University Hospitals Dorset sends 15 User Satisfaction Surveys (USS) to a varied selection of our users every month. Historically, these were in a paper format delivered via the Trust's internal mail service and returned an average response rate of 49%. Following a sustainability initiative by the Trust in 2022, it was identified that the pharmacy department used more paper than any other department. To help reduce paper use, the MAS team changed to using electronic surveys with a Microsoft Forms link sent via email to the same number of recipients. Consequently, the response rate appeared to drop. The purpose of this review was to compare the response rates of paper vs electronic surveys, identify if the drop was significant and if the change in format was the likely cause.

### Method and Results:

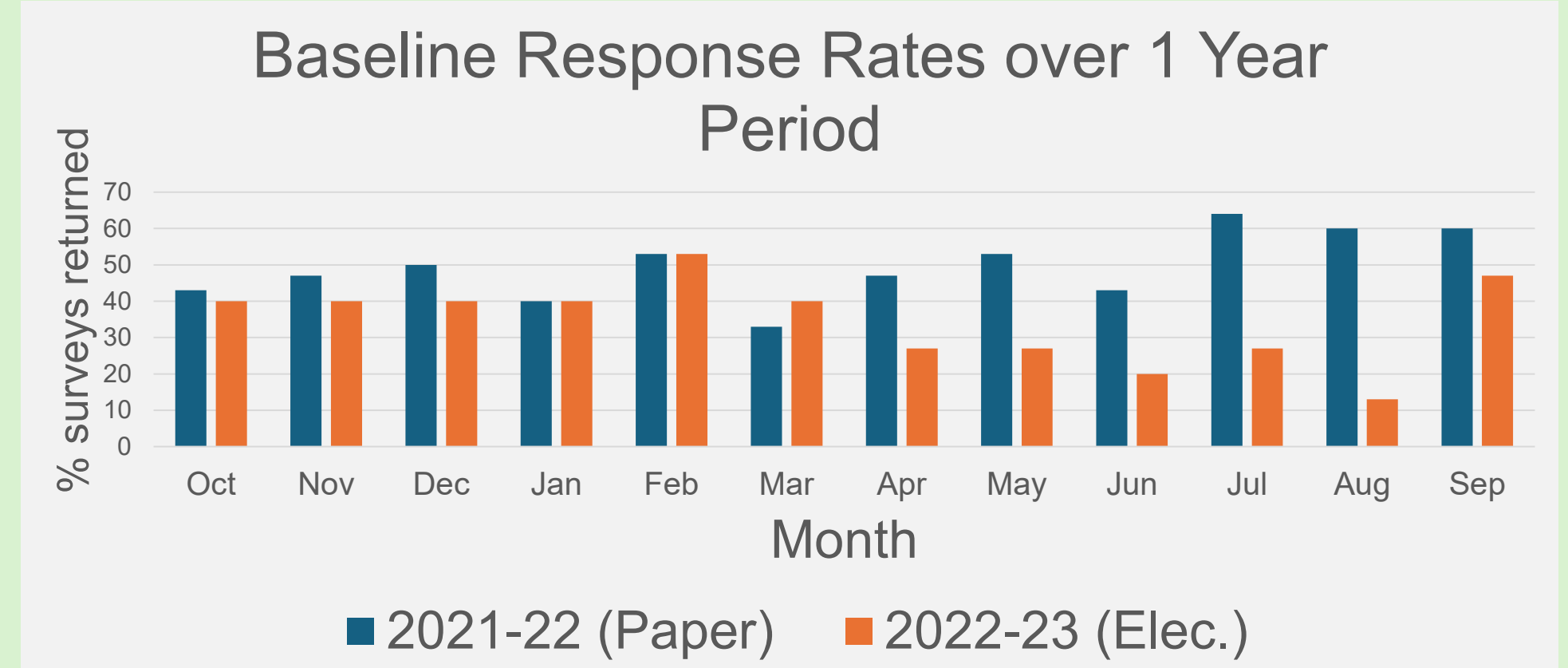
Up to Sept 2022 – PAPER SURVEYS

Oct 2022 – May 2024 ELECTRONIC SURVEYS

June 2024 – Sept 2024 PAPER SURVEYS

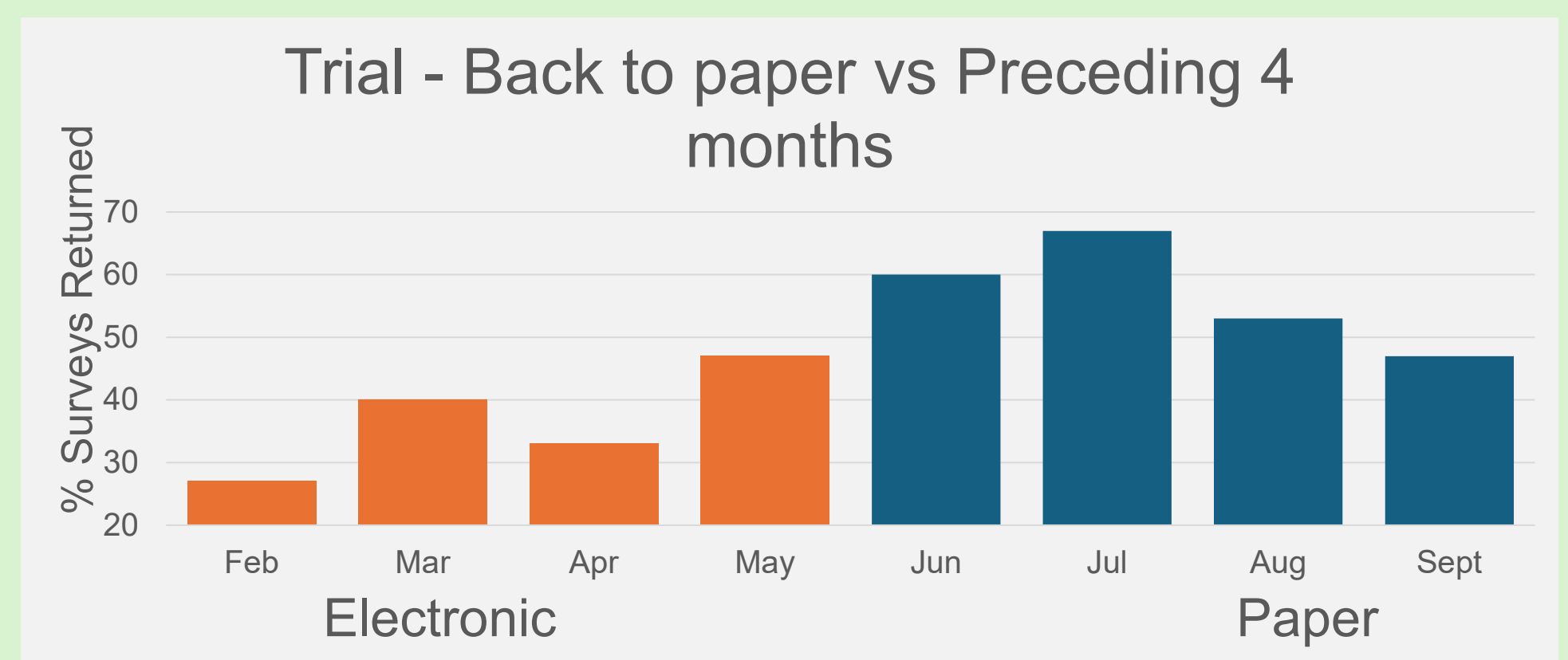
1. Establish baseline results for each format over equivalent 1 year period

• Average % Response Rate 31% lower for electronic



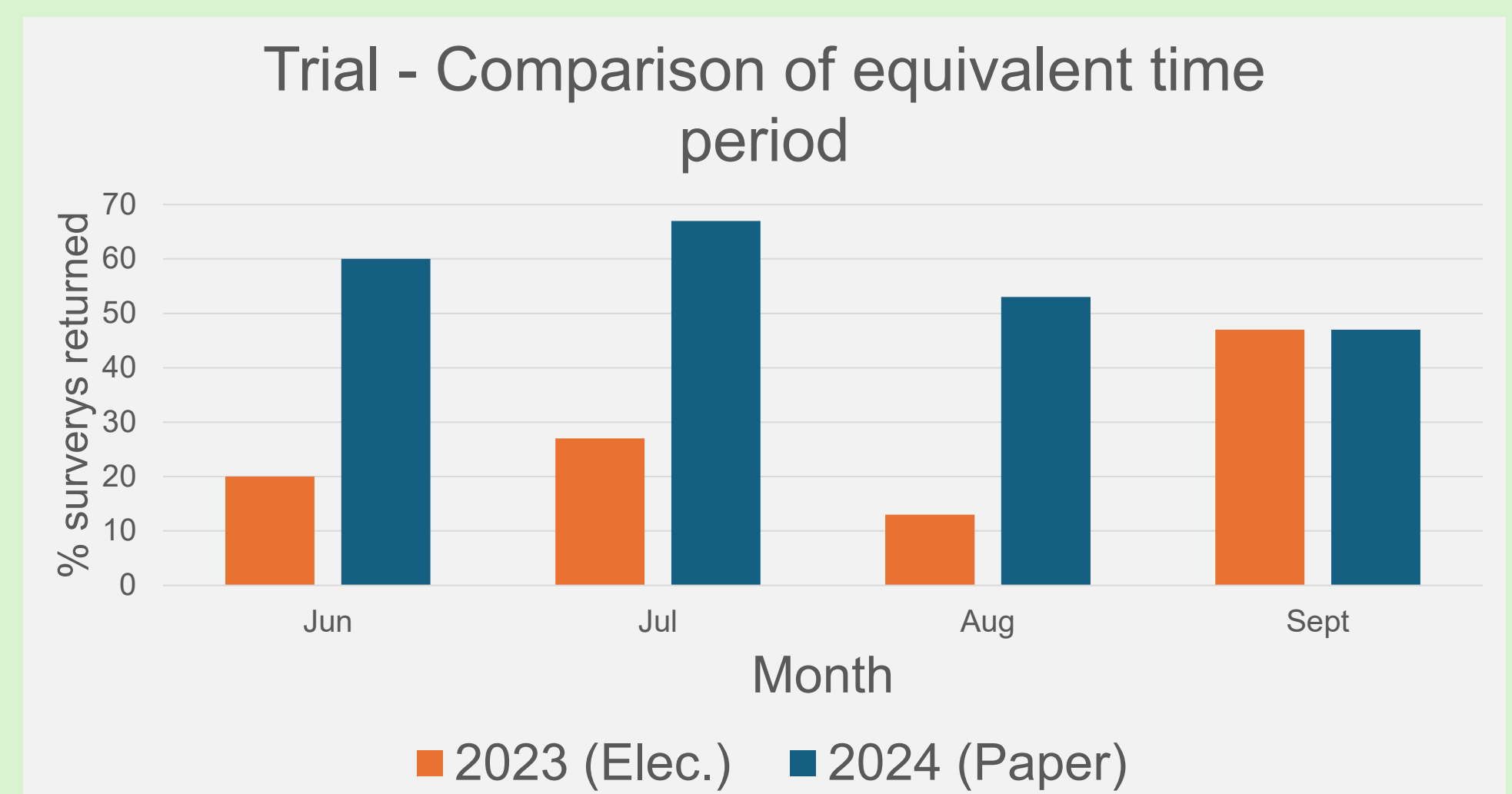
2. June 2024: 4-month trial back to paper surveys. Results compared with preceding 4 months of electronic.

• Average % Response Rate increased by 54%



3. To eliminate bias, trial results compared with equivalent 4-month period of electronic.

• Average % Response Rate for trial period 112% higher



### Discussion and Outcomes:

Contrary to the modern belief that an electronic form would be quicker and more convenient for users, our findings show a significant decline in user engagement with electronic surveys compared to the traditional paper format.

#### WHY?



**EMAIL FATIGUE:** Trust staff receive numerous emails every day and may have to monitor a central team inbox as well as their own. Our users report receiving between 20 (specialist nurse) and 80 (gastro consultant) emails per day.

**NOVELTY/VISIBILITY:** It is rare to receive a letter these days, even within Trust internal mail. Letters also act as a physical reminder to complete the survey. Most email responses were received on the days after they were sent, whereas paper responses are received over 2 to 3 weeks. Therefore, if an email is not seen on the day it is sent, it may get buried or missed.

**TIME OF YEAR:** Results show a significant drop in electronic responses during the summer months. Many people have leave during this time and may only want to catch up with urgent emails only when dealing with a backlog on return.

#### Importance of Feedback



- The purpose of the surveys is to gather information on the performance of the service – more responses produce more meaningful data
- Positive responses demonstrate the value of the service, whereas negative responses can be used to identify areas that require improvement.
- At UHD MAS, improvements to practice have been made as a direct result of feedback from surveys.

**EXAMPLE:** Enquirer commented that our written responses are too long and theoretical. We held a peer review session dedicated to longer written answers to assess this and ensure answers remain focused and concise.

#### Sustainability Factors



- The department uses Ecolabel and Forest Stewardship Council UK (FSC) certified 100% recycled paper. We also carefully open and save return envelopes.
- Email is not without a carbon footprint as when energy is used, carbon emissions are generated. A standard paper letter by mail can generate about 20-25 grams of emissions and a plain text email generates about 4 grams. However, an email with an attachment can generate between 20 (document attachment) and 50 grams (image attachment)<sup>1</sup>
- The emissions of an inpatient bed day in a low intensity ward is a whopping 37.9kg<sup>2</sup>. By providing guidance on the safe and effective use of medicines, a well-functioning Medicines Advice Service can help prevent admissions and support quicker recovery

**OUTCOME:** In May 2024, the pharmacy department instigated paperless dispensing for all discharges except those requiring controlled drugs. Between May 24 and Nov 24 paper usage was down 75% on the previous 6 months. This will soon be expanded to include ward sheets, and therefore overall paper usage by the department will drop even further. On reflection, it was therefore concluded that the 15 sheets of paper used per month for surveys could be justified by the value provided from the increased response rates. This will be kept under review and the MAS team remain vigilant for sustainable methods of data collection which do not significantly compromise response rates.

#### REFERENCES:

1. Kilgore, G. (2022). Email Carbon Footprint vs. Paper Letter by Mail (And the True Price of SPAM). [online] 8 Billion Trees: Carbon Offset Projects & Ecological Footprint Calculators. Available at: <https://8billiontrees.com/carbon-offsets-credits/carbon-ecological-footprint-calculators/email-carbon-footprint/>.  
2. Care pathways guidance on appraising sustainability (Sustainable Development Unit, 2015) Available from: Sustainable Development Unit (SDU) carbon footprints of various units of healthcare activity | CSH Networks (sustainablehealthcare.org.uk)