



Direct access to physical therapy in the Netherlands

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NIVEL: Netherlands Institute for Health Services Research



....about the provision and use of health care services

Presentation

- **Introduction**
Dutch healthcare system
Introduction of direct access to physical therapy (PT)
- **Results direct access physical therapy**
Patient population
Motives
Treatment
Results
Experiences PTs
- **Conclusions**

Healthcare system in the Netherlands

- Standard insurance for all (+ additional private packages)
- Clients can change insurer every year: insurers compete for more clients
- Insurers choose best provider & set requirements
- Providers work in more performance-oriented manner

Roles changed.....

The patients' role is more central; patients have more opportunities to choose the best available care provider

Direct access to PT can be seen within the scope of this changing health care system and enlarged freedom of choice

Physical therapy in the Netherlands

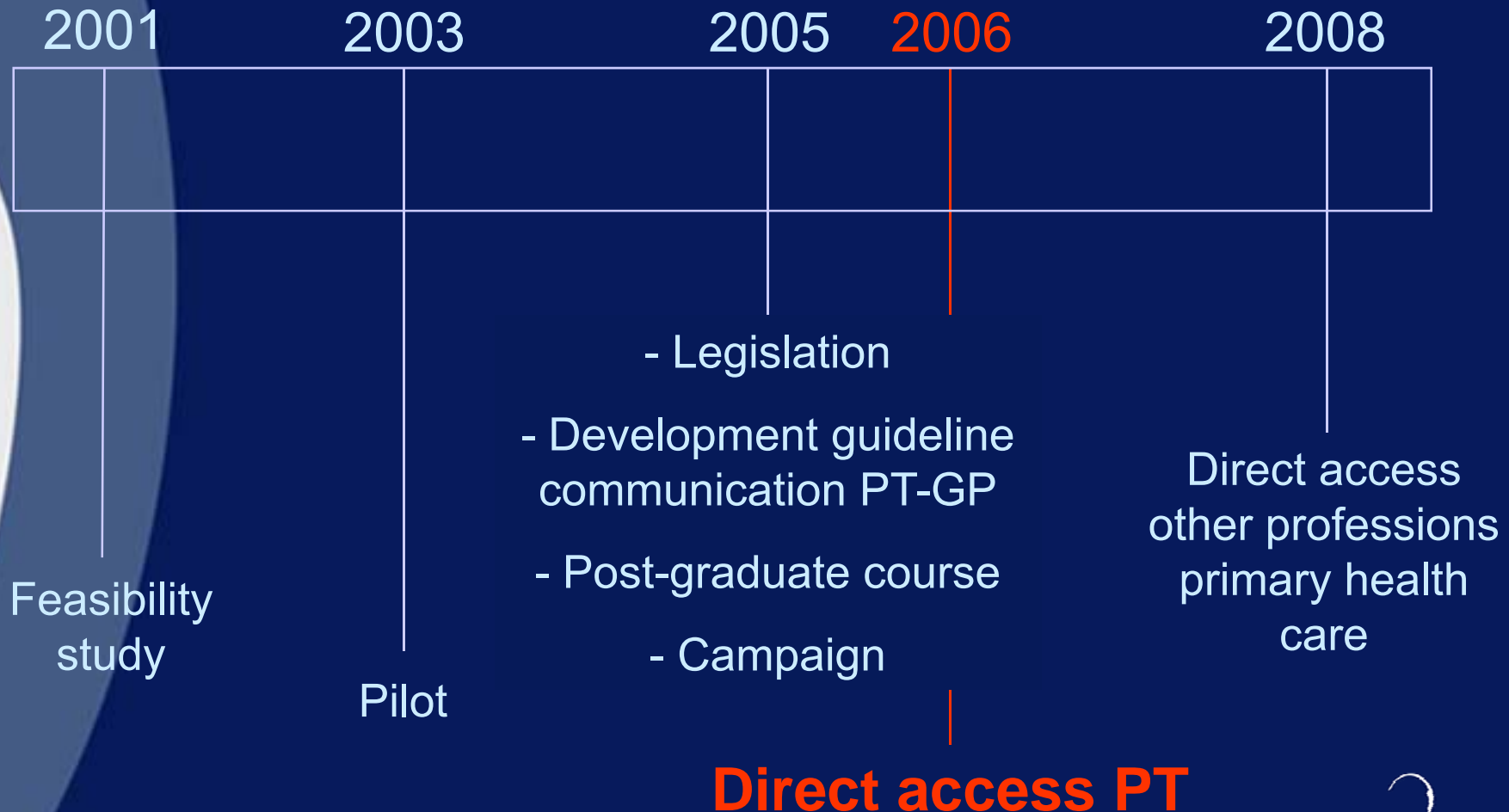
13.000 physical therapists working in private practices

16 million inhabitants
of which 20% used physical therapy in 2008

Until 2006 accessible via GP (90%) or specialist (10%)

GP gatekeeper of health care

Timeline



Feasibility study: interviews (2001)

Pilot study (restricted area) 2003

- Positive experience patients, GPs and PTs
- 10% of patients used direct access
- Volume patient population remained equal

Recommended:

- Specific (post-doctoral) education
- Guidelines for co-operation & communication between GPs & PTs

2005: PTs followed a mandatory post-graduate course:

- process of screening
- detecting “red & yellow flags”
- communication/co-operation PT and GP



Voortaan rechtstreeks naar de fysiotherapeut
> vanaf 2006 heeft u geen verwijfsbriefje meer nodig

Large national promotion campaign:

- TV
- Radio
- National and regional newspapers
- Busses (Amsterdam)

Meer informatie?

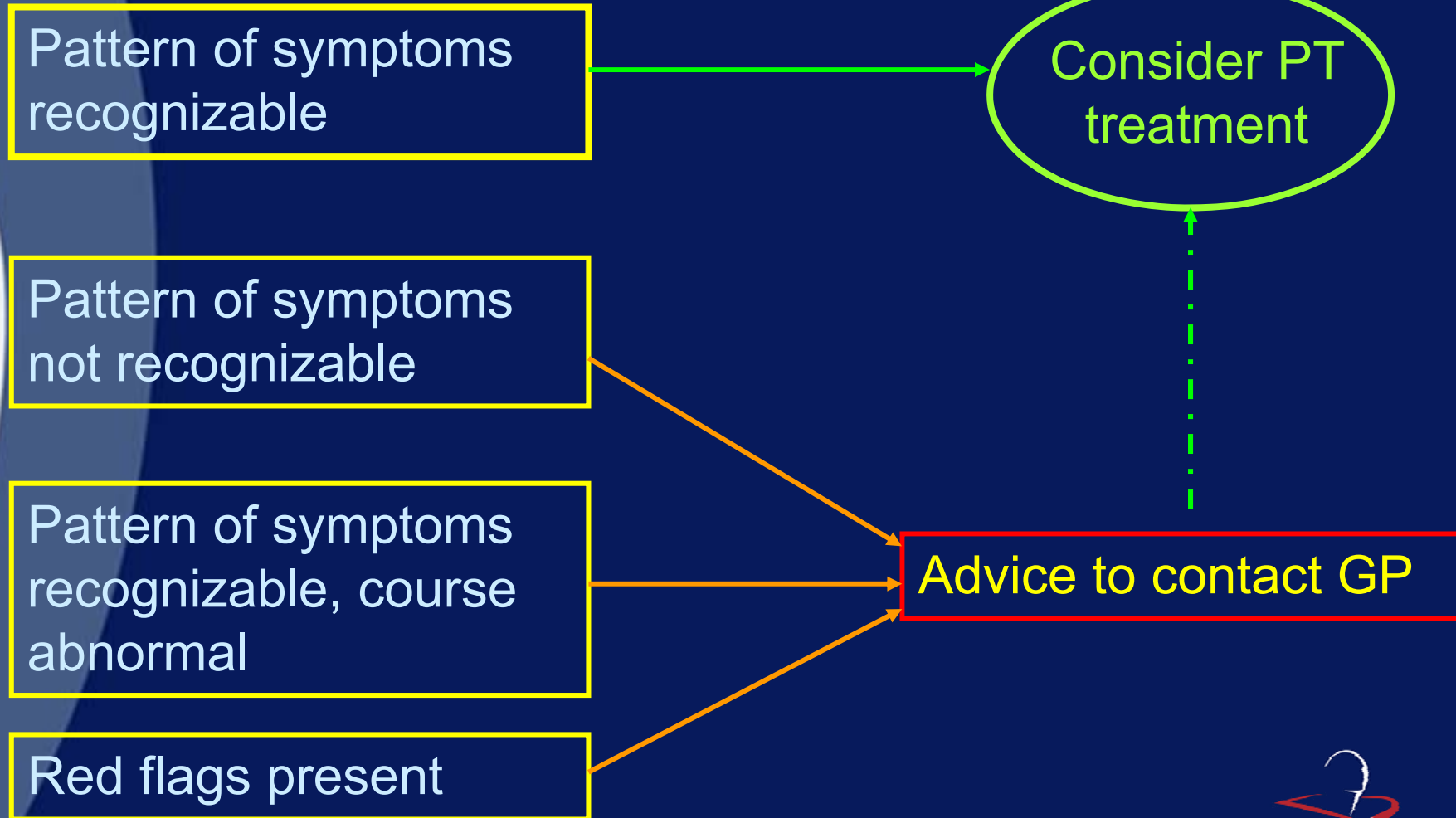
Vraag het uw fysiotherapeut
of ga naar www.fysiotherapie.nl

January 2006

Direct access to physical therapy:

- Evaluation/treatment by a PT possible without referral
- Most insurance companies reimburse direct access without further restrictions, although sometimes limited to preferred providers
- For patients with chronic diseases referral is still needed for reimbursement

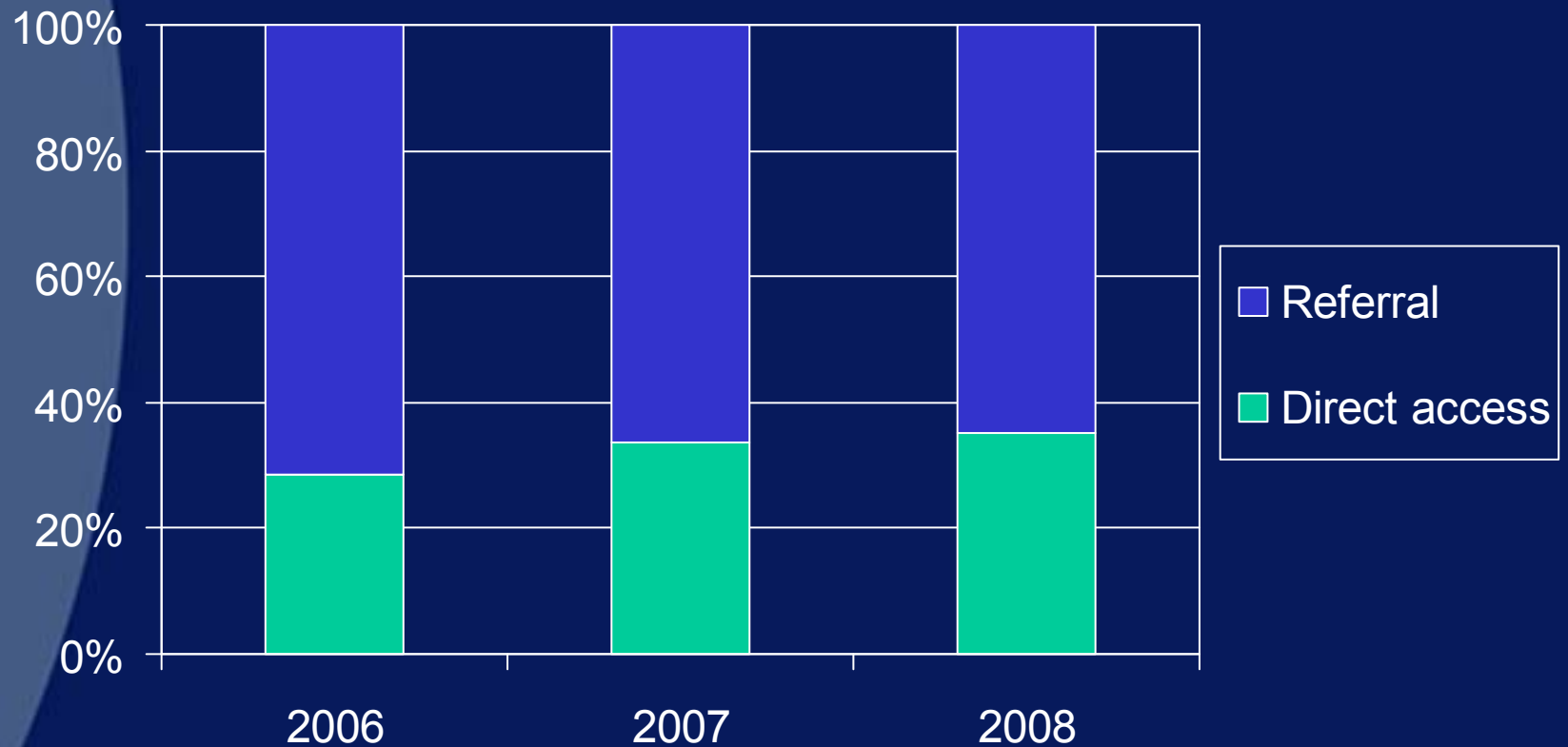
Screening ≠ medical diagnosis



Research questions:

1. How many patients use direct access?
2. Patients' motives for using direct access or referral?
3. Are direct access patients different from referred patients?
4. Has the physical therapists' patients population changed since 2006?
5. What are the experiences of PTs?

Q1) Use of direct access 2006-2008



Q2) Patients' reasons for direct access (2006)

- has had complaints before (54%)
- 'knows' what his/her health problem is (53%)
- knows the specific PT practice (52%)
- saves time (30%)
- PT can better judge whether PT is useful (20%)

Q2) Patients' reasons for visiting a GP first (2006)

- likes the GP to diagnose and advise (57%)
- GP has a general view of all health problems of the patient (38%)
- did not know direct access (27%)
- was already visiting the GP for another health problem (19%)
- did not know whether direct access would be reimbursed (11%)

Q3) Are direct access patients different from referred patients?

yes

They differ from patients referred by their physician on age, level of education, and on several features of the health problem

Determining factors for self referral

Factor	Odds ratio	Reference
High educated	2.76	Lower educated
Back complaints (not specified)	2.56	Other diagnoses
Neck complaints	2.15	Other diagnoses
0-19 years	2.11	> 60 years
Low back pain	1.94	Other diagnoses
< 1 month complaints	1.92	> 3 months complaints
Familiar with PT	1.63	Not familiar
Recurrent problem	1.53	new problem

Examples

higher educated patients aged 20 to 39 years with back complaints existing for less than 1 month: 67% use direct access

lower educated patients aged over 60 years with long existing complaints other than back: 15% use direct access

Differences in treatment

direct access patients are less often taken into treatment after first contact compared to referred patients:

89.0% vs. 96.0%

More often treatment for:

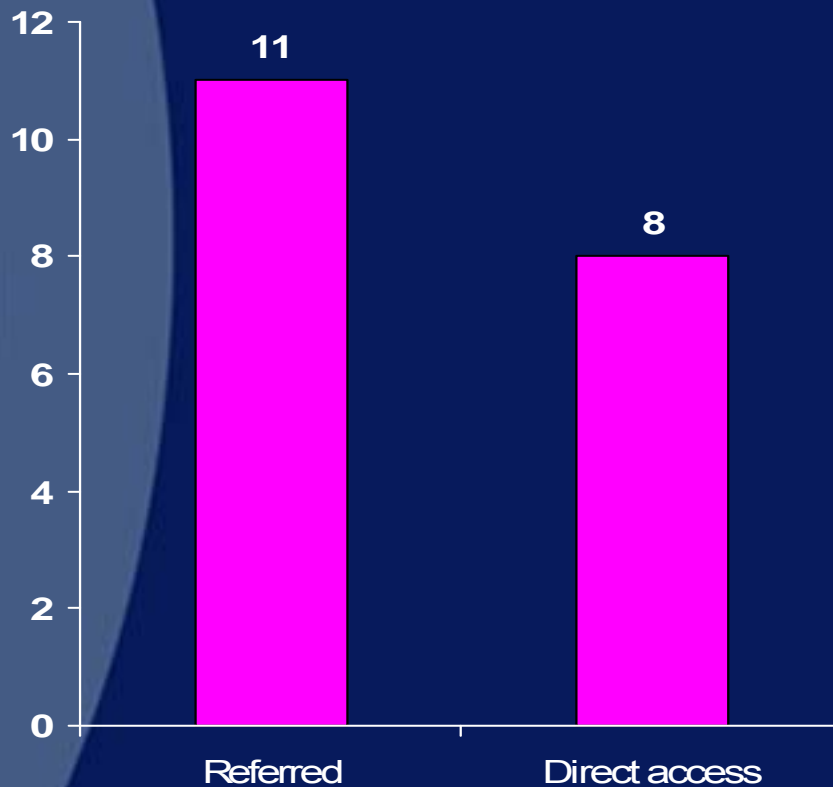
women, elderly and patients with long existing problems or recurrent problems

Examples:

patients aged under 19 years with complaints of short duration: in 74% of the patients treatment is started

patients aged over 60 years with long-lasting problems: in 95% of het patients treatment is started

Differences in number of treatments for self-referrals?



Self-referrals receive 3 treatment sessions less than referred patients, corrected for demographics

Differences in reasons for discharge

Direct access users:

88% “treatment finished; goals are reached”

2% “patient ended treatment”

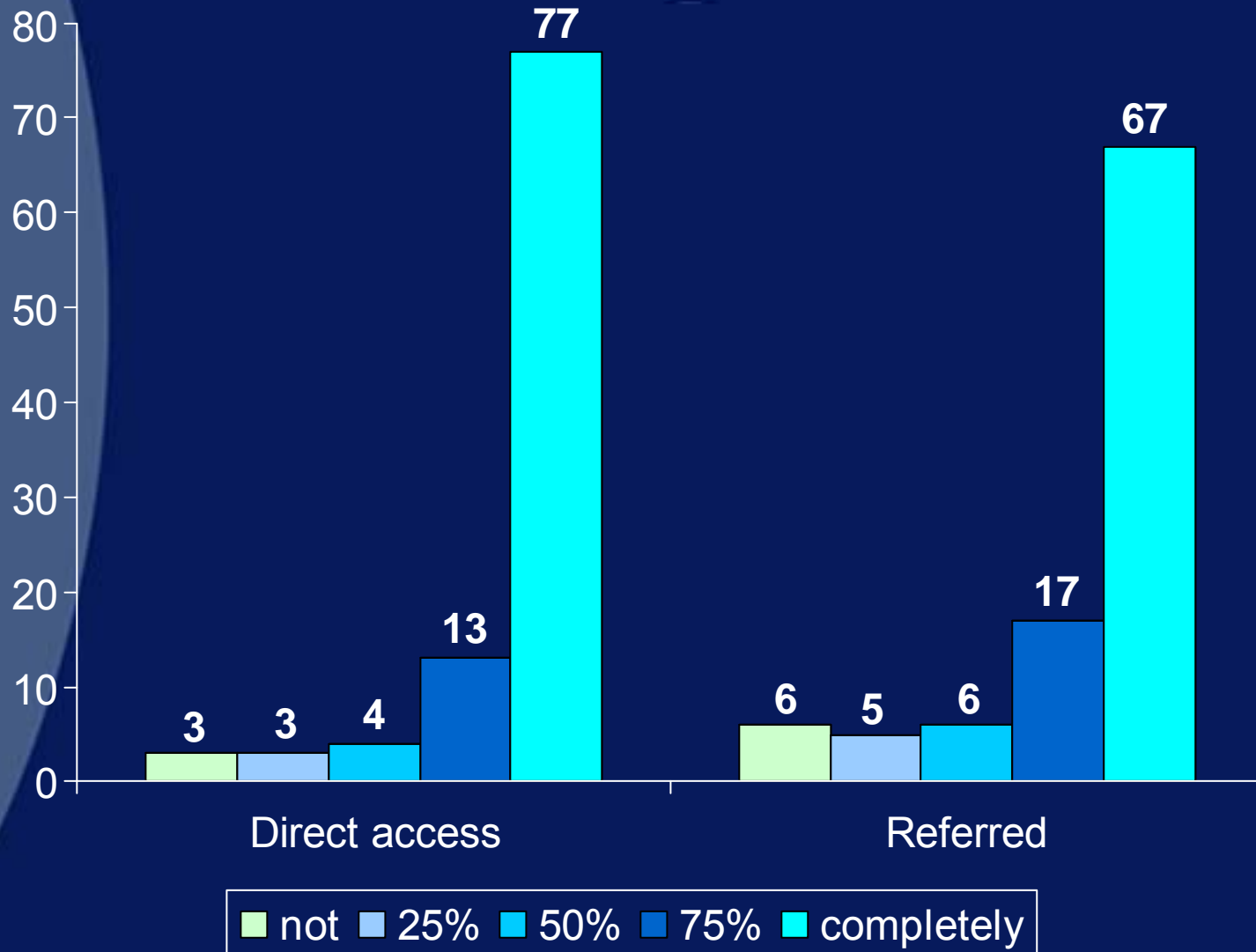
Referred patients:

78% “treatment finished; goals are reached”

5% “patient ended treatment”

direct access:
referred:

77% goals fully reached
67% goals fully reached



Q4. patient population 2005-2008

2005

42% male

12% low back

33% recurrent

39% < 1 month

45% familiar with PT

2008

43% male

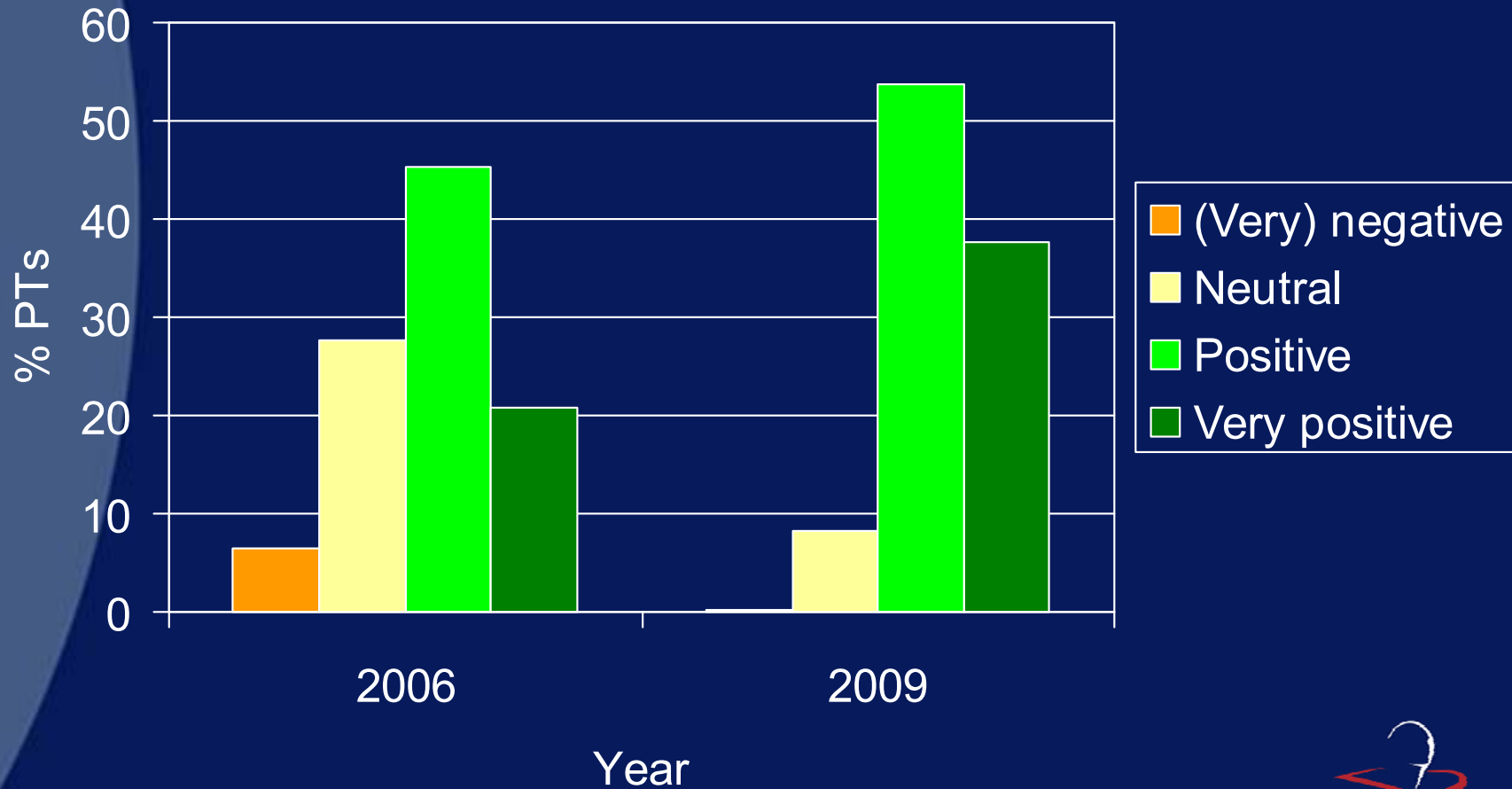
13% low back

35% recurrent

42% < 1 month

52% familiar with PT

Q5 Experiences PTs



Positive experiences PTs

- Acknowledgement profession 68%
- Faster accessibility patients 62%
- Increase responsibility PT 61%
- Freedom of choice patients 59%
- Faster recovery 48%

Negative experiences PTs

- GPs still refer to PT but do not write referral letter anymore 77%
- Increased administration 64%

Conclusions

- PTs are happy with measure. Some negative practical experiences.
- Policy measure aimed at increasing choices for patients: 35% of patients use new measure
- Communication between GP and PT needs attention
- No increase of patient population?

Further research

- Cost-effectiveness (why less treatment visits / results seem better / growing population?)
- Accuracy of diagnostic decision making of PTs (and GPs)
- Experiences patients, GPs and insurers

The image features a series of dark, leafless tree silhouettes against a warm, golden-orange sunset sky. The trees are arranged in a line, with their intricate branch structures clearly visible. In the foreground, a wire fence with wooden posts runs across the scene. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

Thank you for listening!
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