

Increasing Patient Utilization of Community Resource Desk in a Community Health Center in Northern Arizona

Aya Andos, MS, Lauren Hays, MS, Camilla Freestone, Donna Cottrell, Yash Sangvhi, Sultan Akbar, Tiffany Harmanian, Benjamin Hewson, MS, Surekha Appikarla, BDS, MPH, Joy H. Lewis, DO, PhD, Chad Taylor, DO
Department of Public Health: A. T. Still University School of Osteopathic Medicine in Arizona; Colorado Plateau Center for Health Professions, North Country HealthCare



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Background

Social determinants of health (SDOH)—including factors like housing, food access, transportation, and socioeconomic status—have a profound impact on health outcomes.^{1,3,4} In response to these needs, community health centers (CHCs) are integrating social services into their care models.^{2,5} North Country HealthCare (NCHC), a CHC serving northern Arizona, implemented the Health Partners (HP) desk several years ago as a resource for patients to access community support related to SDOH.

Despite its potential, the HP desk has historically seen low utilization. Previous observations suggested limited patient awareness and inconsistent healthcare provider referrals may contribute to its underuse.

Recognizing the importance of connecting patients with appropriate medical & non-medical resources, this project was developed as a quality improvement initiative aimed at increasing visibility and engagement with the HP desk. By leveraging bilingual marketing materials and provider engagement strategies, the goal was to inform and empower patients to take a more active role in addressing their social needs while reducing the burden on providers.

Objectives

1. To improve patient awareness of the HP desk and the services it provides.
2. To increase patient engagement and utilization of the HP desk to address social needs.
3. To increase the frequency of referrals from NCHC providers to the HP desk.
4. To identify the most common SDOH concerns presented at the HP desk.

Methods

- Marketing materials were designed using language at or below a sixth grade reading level; materials included posters, pamphlets, and “Rx” style prescription pads in English and Spanish which were implemented in the CHC prior to the start of the project period.
- Posters (96) were placed in the lobbies, pharmacy, exam rooms, and bathrooms. Pamphlets (200) were placed in the lobbies. Rx pads (40) were placed in provider offices and medical assistant stations
- The project concept was explained to all providers who were present for discussion at the start of the project period.
- Participants were NCHC patients who utilized the HP desk within our data collection timeframe.
- Data compared 10 weeks of HP encounters in the spring of 2024 the spring of 2025 and included date of birth, visit date, user needs, and other variables.
- Data analysis included two-tailed t-tests for visit frequencies and chi-square analysis comparing marketing material types.

Results

- 36 encounters and 29 individuals in spring 2024 and 63 encounters and 43 individuals in spring 2025 utilized the HP desk for a total of 99 encounters and 72 individuals.
- Number of visits per week ranged from 0-6 in spring 2024 compared to 2-14 in spring 2025.
- Average HP desk utilization increased from 3.6 +/-2.2 visits/week in 2024 and 6.3 +/-3.2 visits/week in 2025 (p= 0.04).
- In 2025, 17/55 patients indicated that they had seen marketing materials prior to their visit to the HP desk.
- Posters at check-in were reported seen by 6/17 patients, but no marketing material was significantly reported more than another (p=0.28).
- The most common priorities patients requested assistance with were transportation and housing in 2024 and 2025, followed by health clinic and phone assistance in 2024 and 2025, respectively.

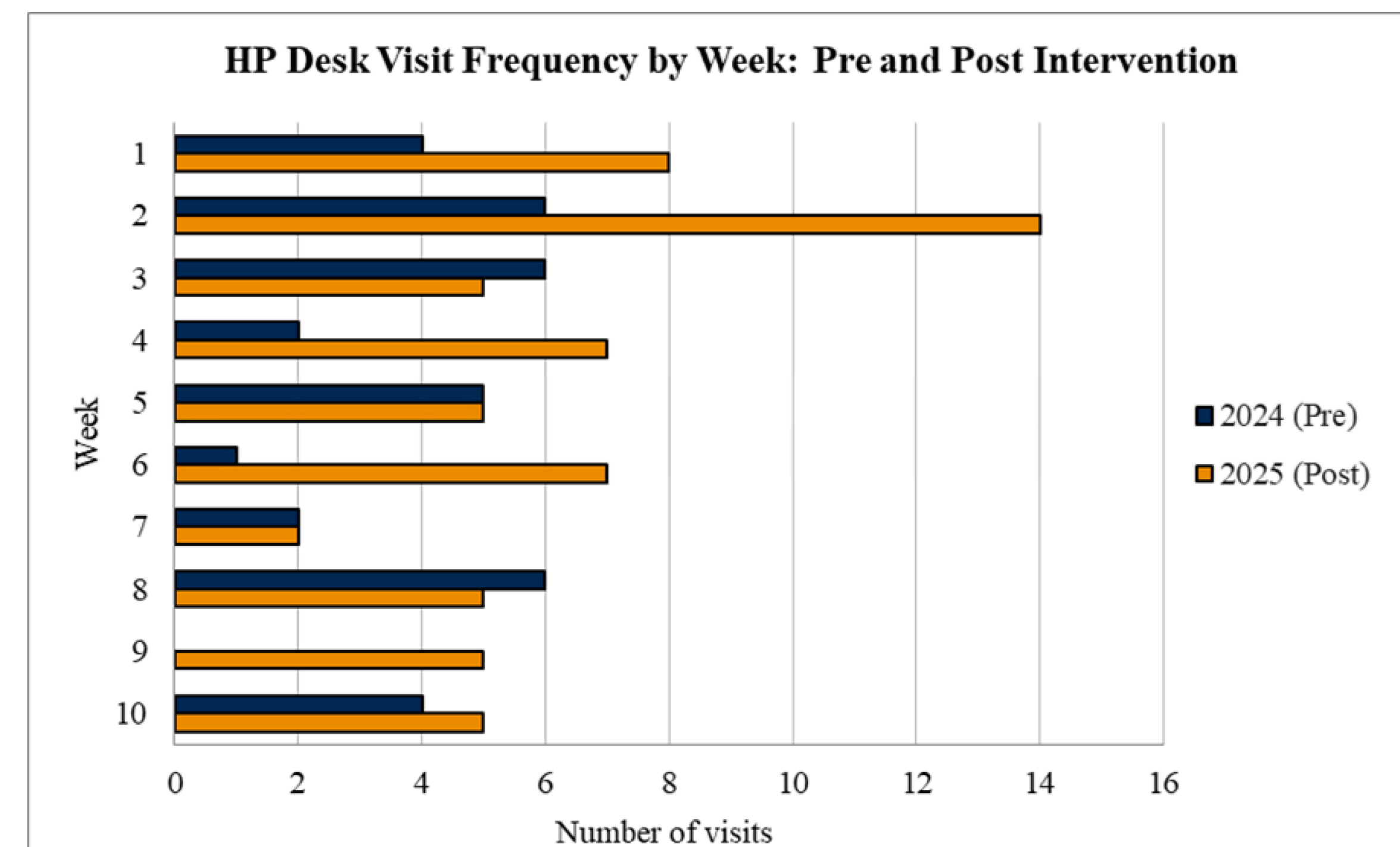


Figure 1. Weekly average HP desk visits in spring 2024 and spring 2025.

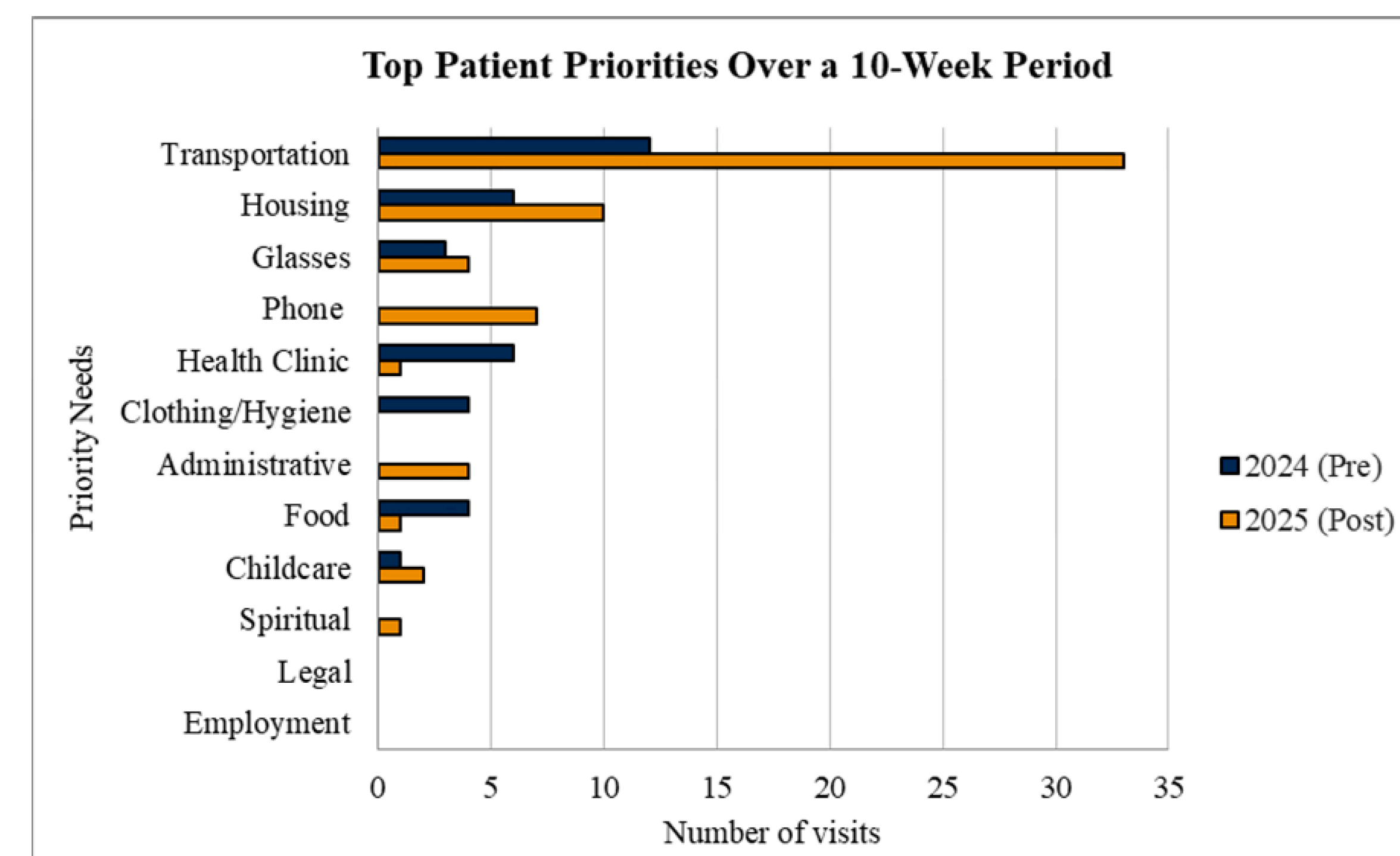


Figure 2. Distribution of first priorities patients came in requesting assistance for in 2024 and 2025.

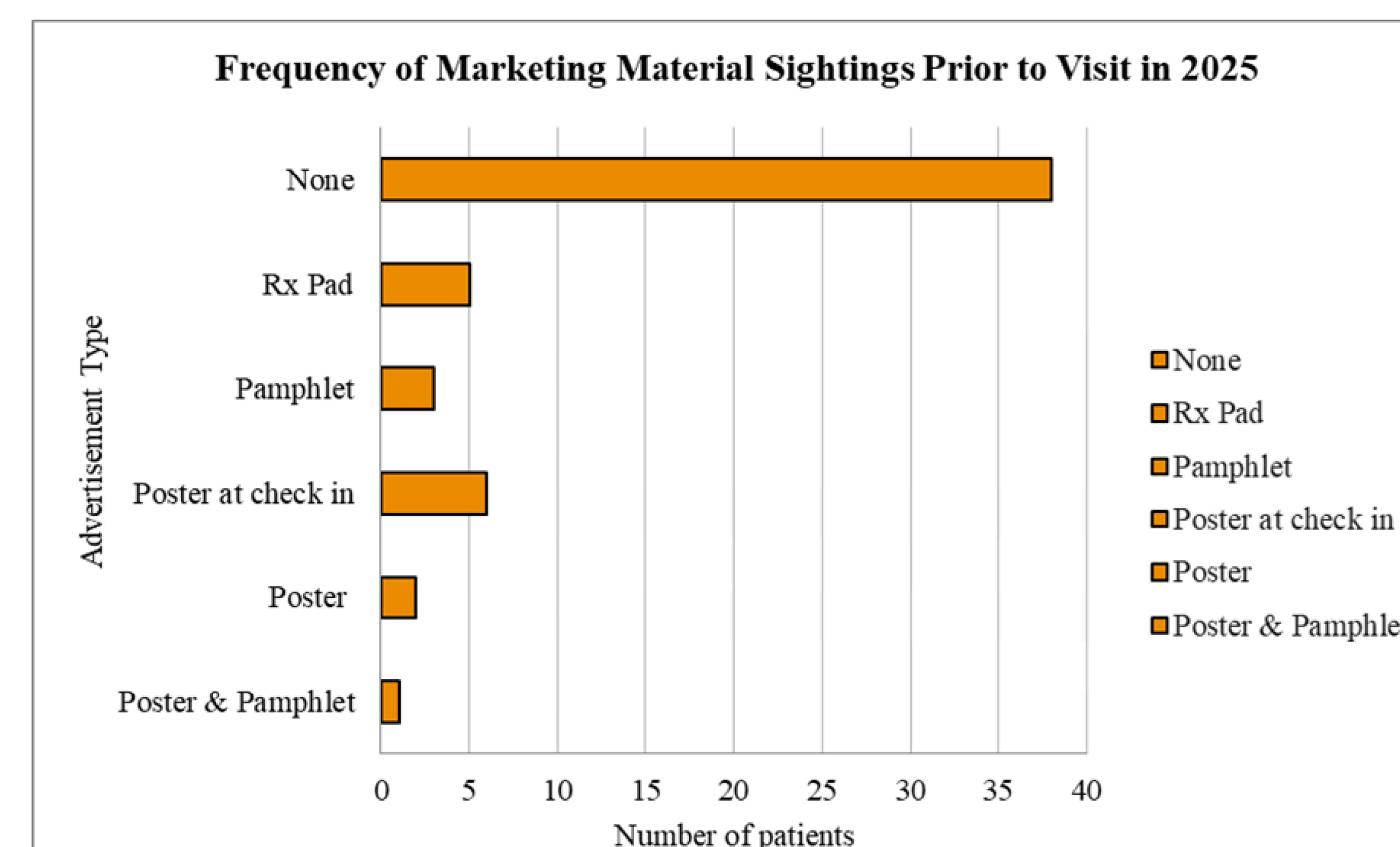


Figure 3. Frequency of patients seeing marketing materials prior to visiting HP desk in 2025.

Discussion

- Utilization Increased
 - Significant increase in utilization indicates increased patient awareness of HP program.
 - External factors may have increased utilization: HP intern availability, outside referrals, travel conditions, word of mouth.
- Marketing Played a Role
 - Marketing increased overall desk utilization and may have allowed a new subset of patients to learn about the desk.
 - No significant difference in frequency of marketing type seen indicates posters, pamphlets, and rx pads were equally valuable/invaluable in providing information
 - A longer project period may have increased marketing visibility.
 - Financial limitations restricted quantity of materials distributed
 - Patients may have been subconsciously influenced or unable to recall exposure (recall bias).
 - Materials were limited to English and Spanish
- Return Visits Suggest Value
 - More patients returned for second/third visits in 2025.
 - Indicates ongoing engagement and perceived benefit.
- Top Social Needs Addressed by HP Desk Identified
 - Transportation and housing were consistently the most common priorities.
 - Reflects alignment with key SDOH in CHC patient populations.
- Implications for CHCs
 - SDOH resource desk supported by marketing increases access to social services.
 - Provides a framework for other CHCs to implement a similar resource.

Conclusions

- The marketing materials implemented in NCHC in spring 2025 successfully increased the utilization of the HP desk.
- Transportation and housing were the top two priorities that patients requested assistance with in both 2024 and 2025.
- Future projects could include longer data collection periods, adding a latency period between implementing marketing and starting data collection, expanding to multiple clinics, and increasing marketing materials to include digital media. Additionally, projects could focus on a patient's perceived experience at the HP desk, follow-up with patients to determine if they used the information from the HP desk, a survey of patients inquiring what they thought about the marketing materials and why they did/did not utilize the HP desk after seeing them.

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