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Demographics and Treatment Strategies Utilized During a Service-Learning Trip to a Medically Underserved Region: Guatemala 2019

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Purpose

Synthesize demographic information and intervention plans to educate physical therapists and students to effectively evaluate and treat medically underserved populations abroad.

Background

Students in the “Global Health Perspectives in Physical Therapy” elective at the University of Puget Sound participated in a five-day, faculty led, service learning trip. The students partnered with a host organization to provide physical therapy services in Zacapa, Guatemala.



Fig 1. The group of students in the Global Health Perspectives elective: Guatemala 2019

Methods

Age, sex, physical therapy diagnosis, and intervention(s) were recorded. Percentages were extrapolated from these data to reflect the frequency of each type of patient population and intervention strategy. Orthopedic conditions were reported at higher frequencies than any other type of visit; this information was anatomically separated to provide further context.

Results

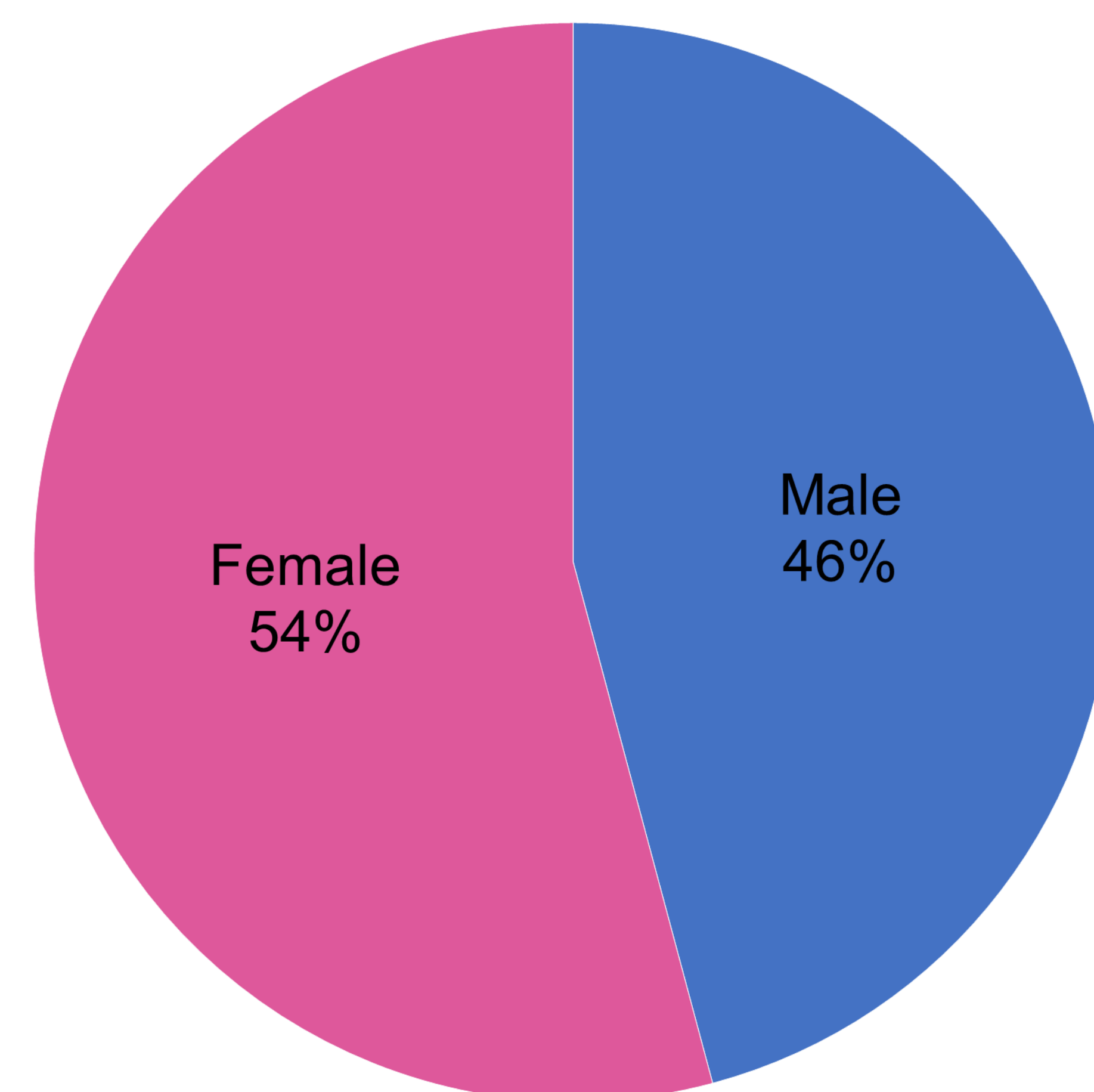


Fig 2a. Distribution of patients by sex

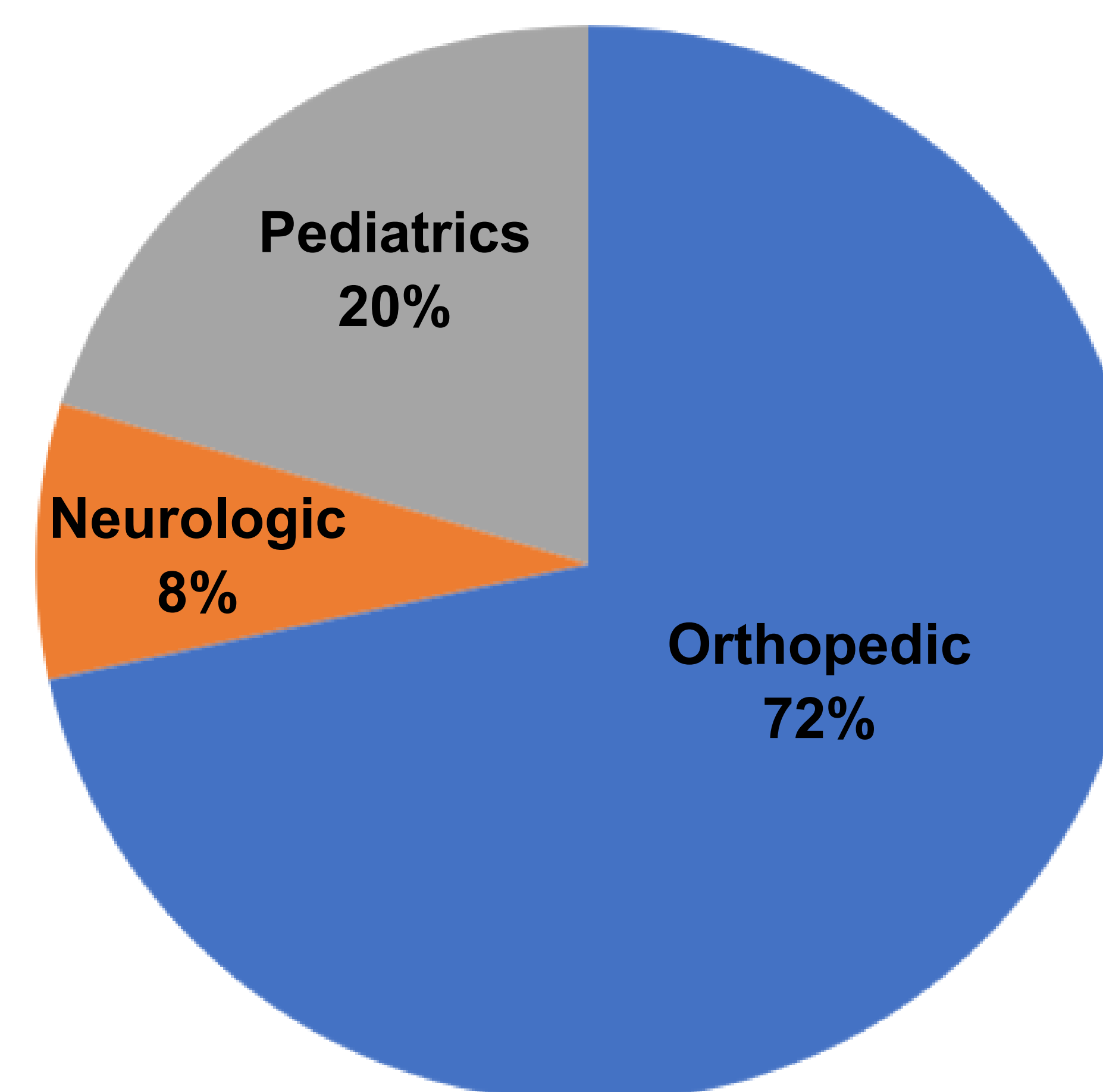


Fig 2b. Distribution of patient populations seen during a service-learning trip to Guatemala

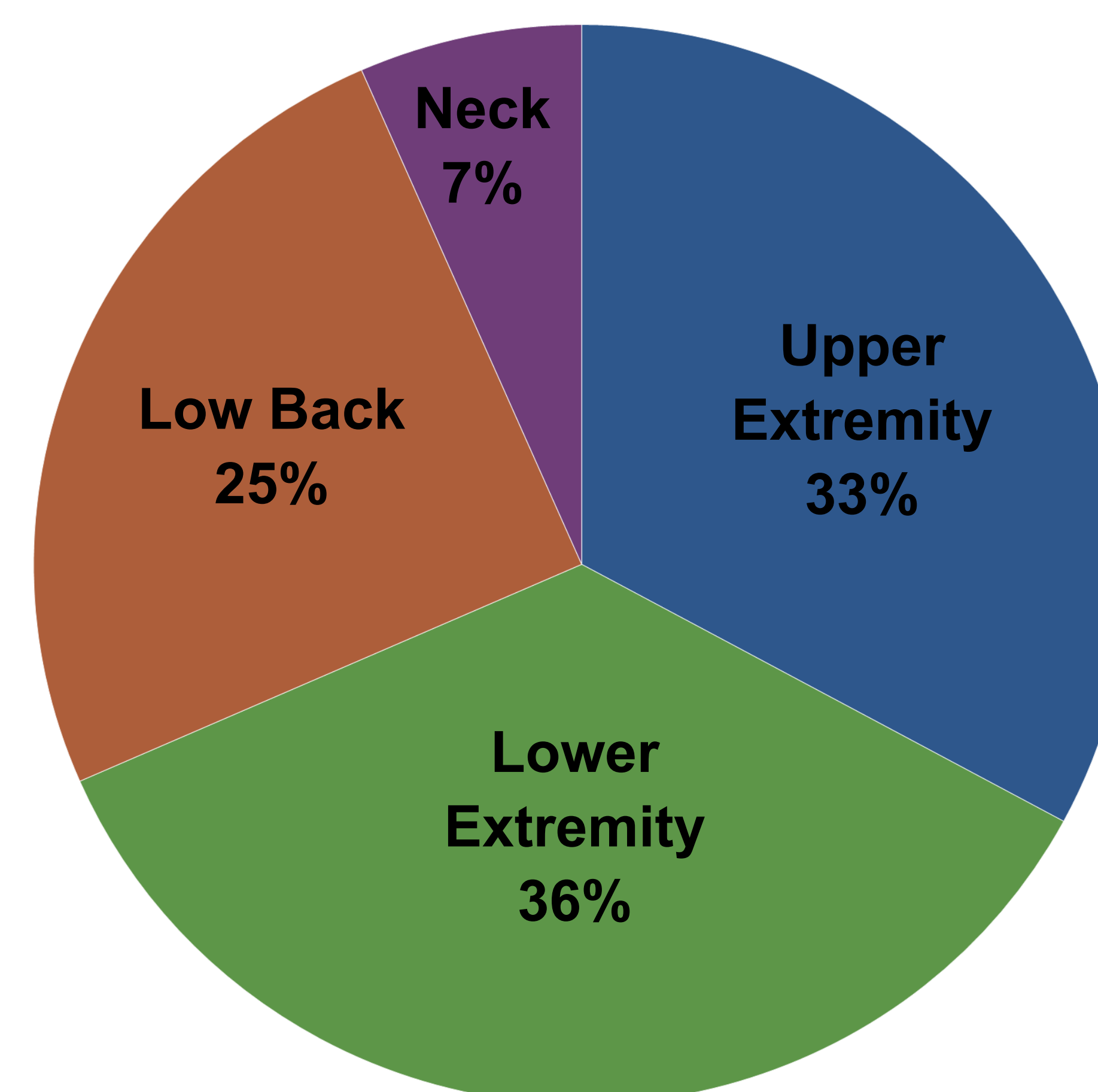


Fig 2c. Anatomic distribution of orthopedic injuries seen during a service-learning trip to Guatemala

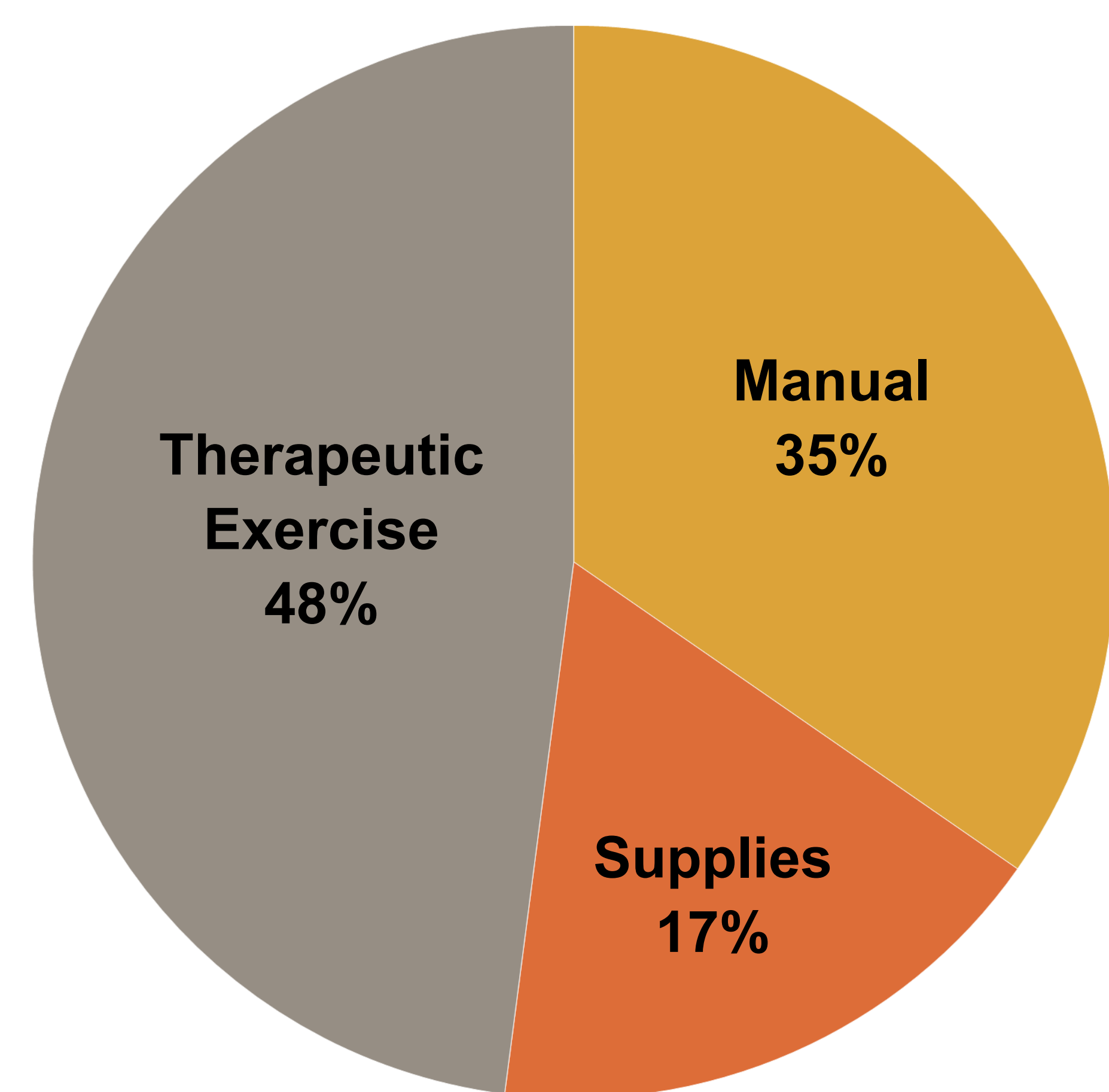


Fig 2d. Distribution of Physical Therapy interventions provided during a service learning trip to Guatemala

Recommendations for Future Students

- Attend the student orthopedic and manual physical therapy association or student physical therapy association events for continued opportunities to practice manual interventions.
- Attend a workshop on evaluation and treatment of the upper extremity: orient students to common conditions, how to treat, and best practices to scan for red flags. The upper extremity was a common area of concern and students are not yet fully prepared to treat the upper extremity at this point in their education.
- Participate in the Sociocultural Awareness Workshop to improve cultural safety.
- Extensive review of in-class evidence based reviews for various conditions.
- Establish a patient encounter framework that highlights patient buy-in and home exercise program compliance after the provided service.
- Understand multidisciplinary roles and communication styles: interpreter, caregiver, physical therapists in Guatemala.
- Review modalities as treatment strategies: wound care, Ace bandaging, orthotic fitting, slings, casting, and wheelchair seating.
- Review all Pediatrics readings before departure to better understand pediatric approach to practice for common conditions.

Conclusion

The results of this descriptive inquiry suggest that students who participate in future service-learning experiences in the Zacapa district of Guatemala should have a robust understanding of upper extremity examination as well as manual therapy and therapeutic exercise intervention.