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Institutet**

# **Sick leave certification problems, solutions & evidence**

Kristina Alexanderson, professor  
Division of Insurance Medicine  
Dept of Clinical Neuroscience

**No conflicts  
of interest to  
declare**

# Results from

- Systematic reviews
  - A large survey
-

# State costs in Sweden

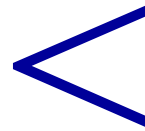
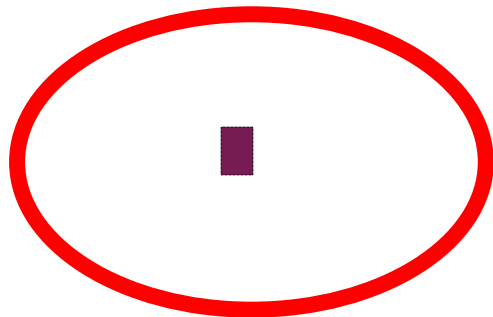
Sick  
leave

≈

Health  
care

# Research

Sick leave



Health  
care



# Research about:



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Risk factors for  
sick leave

RTW

SA  
practice

Consequences  
of sick leave





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# **Physicians' work with sickness certification**



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# **Physicians' sickness certification practice**

## **A systematic literature review**

**SOU 2010:107**



**STATENS OFFENTLIGA  
UTREDNINGAR**

**Sociala rådet**

Söderberg, Lindholm,  
Kärrholm, Alexanderson

# Aim

- Establish the knowledge base regarding physicians' sickness certification practices
  - Update the previous review by The Swedish Council on Health Technology Assessment (SBU)  
(Wahlström & Alexanderson; SJPB 2004)
-



# Included

Studies with empirical data on  
physicians' sickness certification  
practice,

published in English in peer-reviewed  
scientific journals in 2002 – Aug 2009

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# Systematic regarding:

1. Identification of studies
  2. Assessment of relevance
  3. Data extraction
  4. Assessment of study quality
  5. Establish scientific evidence
-

## 4. Assessment of study quality

Design, drop out, bias, methods for analyses,  
precision

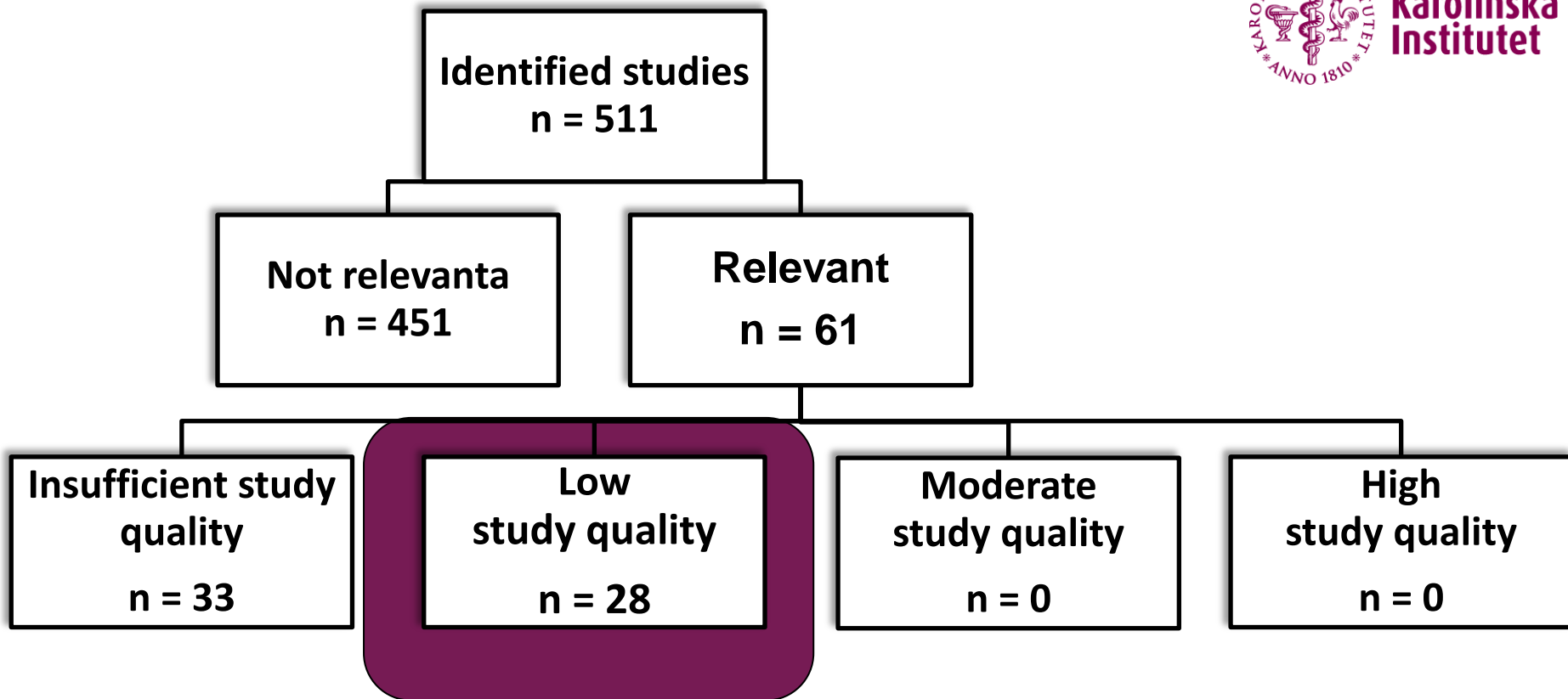
- Insufficient

- Low

- Moderate

- High

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**+15 from  
the previous  
review**

# Grading scientific evidence

## Evidence level; Scientific support

- 1 strong
- 2 moderate
- 3 **limited**
- 0 insufficient

# Great variation regarding:

- aim
  - design
  - study object & numbers
  - data
  - analyses
  - outcome measures
-

# Number participating physician/study

Range: 2 - 5455

<b>Median</b>	<b>Mean (SD)</b>
65	518 (1205)
56	121 (200) (if omitting the largest project)

Most studies were on GPs

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# Areas studied

1. Patient factors 9
  2. Physician factors 19
  3. Physician problems 16
  4. Quality of sickness certificates 4
  5. Do physicians & patients agree? 2
  6. Intervention studies 7
-



# 1. Patient factors 9

Patient:

- age
  - sex
  - educational level/job
  - morbidity
  - assessment of own work capacity
  - asks for sick note
-

## 2. Physician factors

19

Physician:

- age/years in practice
  - sex
  - believes/feelings
  - specialty
-

**Physicians** experience sickness  
certification as problematic

Limited  
evidence!

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### 3. **Problems** experienced in sickness certification

- Handle the two roles
- Different opinions on need for SA
- Assess work capacity/need of sick leave
- Not enough knowledge
- To cooperate with others

Limited  
evidence!

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**All these problems are  
aspects of professionalism**

**What are the possibilities for  
physicians to obtain, maintain,  
& practice professional  
competence in insurance  
medicine?**

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# Interventions?

## No evidence!

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# Conclusions

- **Few studies, mainly GPs, low quality**
  - **Extremely limited knowledge base**
  - **We need more and better studies**
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# Conclusions

- **Few studies, mainly GPs, low quality**
- **Extremely limited knowledge base**
- **We need more and better studies**

**based on an understanding of the tasks and roles of physicians regarding sickness certification**



# Sickness-certification tasks

1. Identify disease/injury
  2. Assess function and work capacity
  3. Consider pros & cons with sick leave
  4. Determine duration of sick leave
  5. Co-operate with other stakeholders
  6. Write the certificate
  7. Document decisions & measures
-

# Physician's roles in relation to patients

1. **Treating physician**
  2. **Gate keeper**
  3. **Medical expert**
  4. **Decide on compulsory care**
-

**We need studies with  
larger samples  
more detailed knowledge**



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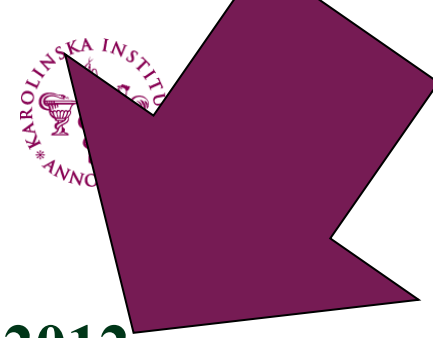
# **Physicians' work with sickness certification – results from three surveys in Sweden**

# Type of data about physicians' sickness-certification practices

- Questionnaires
  - **Audits**
  - **Interviews**
  - **Recordings** (of consultations, meetings, etc)
  - **Case reports**
  - **Sick-leave data**
  - **Information from sickness certificates**
  - **Data from medical records or insurance records**
- } to physicians, patients, insurance staff, employers, etc
-

Year	Included physicians	# items	Response rate
<b>2004</b>	7,700 (All <65 years, 2 counties)	83	71%
<b>2008</b>	37,000 (All in Sweden)	163	61%
<b>2012</b>	33,000 (most in Sweden <68 y)	163	58%

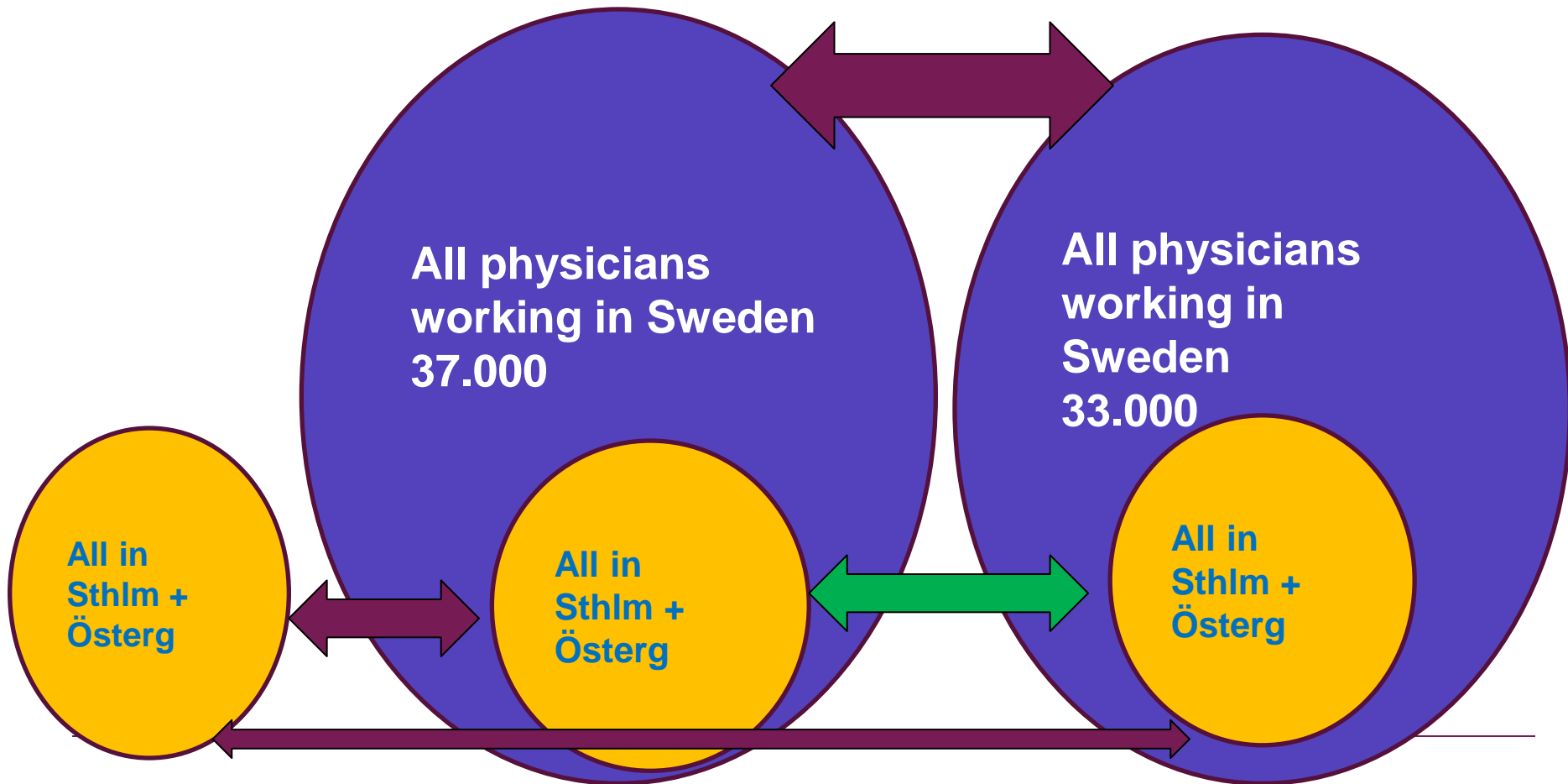
# Questionnaire



2004

2008

2012



# Questionnaire areas

- **Frequencies of situations**
  - **Problems; frequency & severity**
  - **Competence;**
  - **Guidelines**
  - **Context**
  - **Unnecessary long sick leaves**
  - **Contacts with others**
-



**You are welcome to use  
the questionnaire!**

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# Conclusions

- **Many work with this! Not only GPs**
  - **Find it problematic, especially to assess work capacity**
  - **Physicians want to learn more about insurance medicine**
-

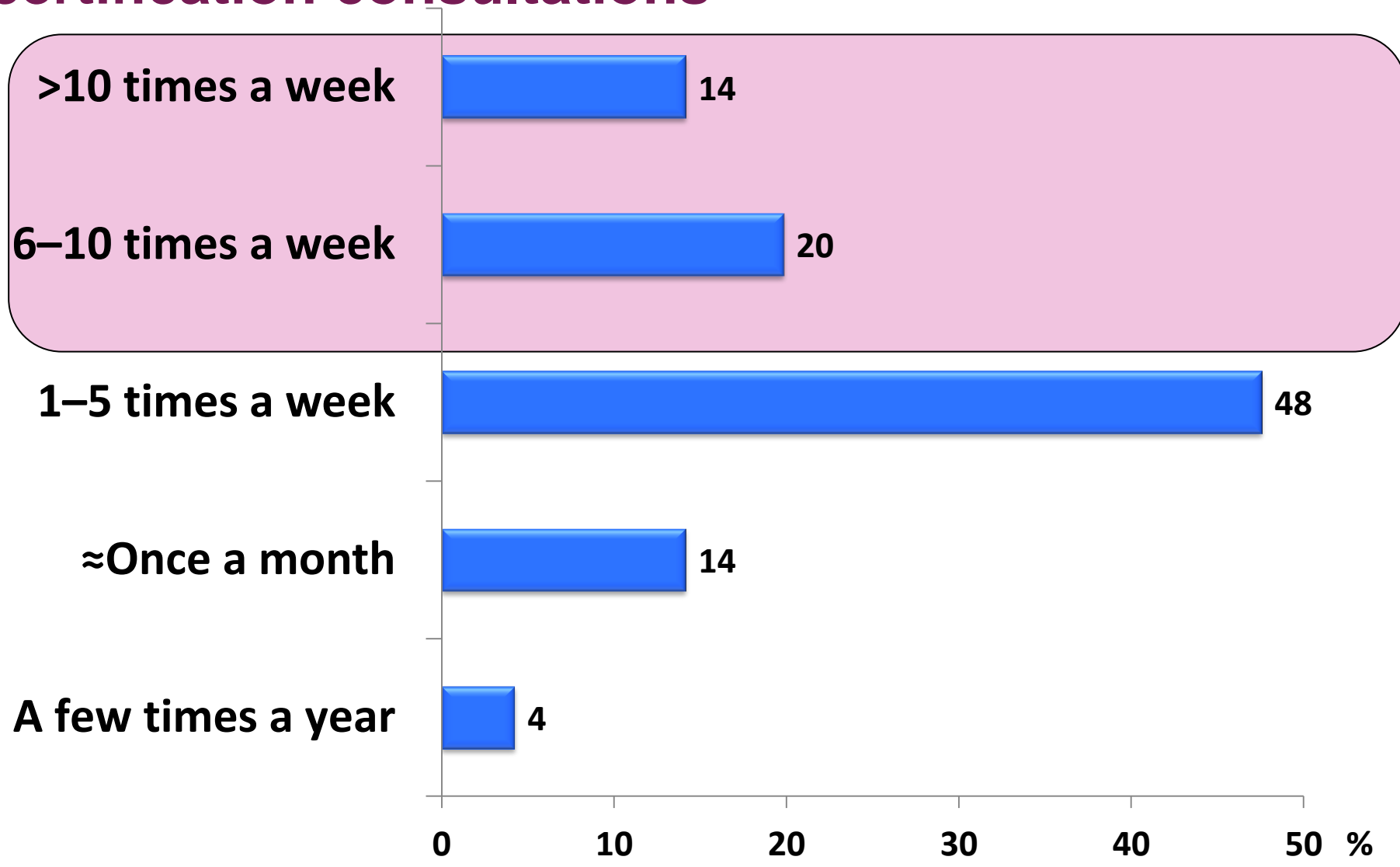
**2012 Study population: 33,144**  
**Response rate: 58% (n=19,107)**

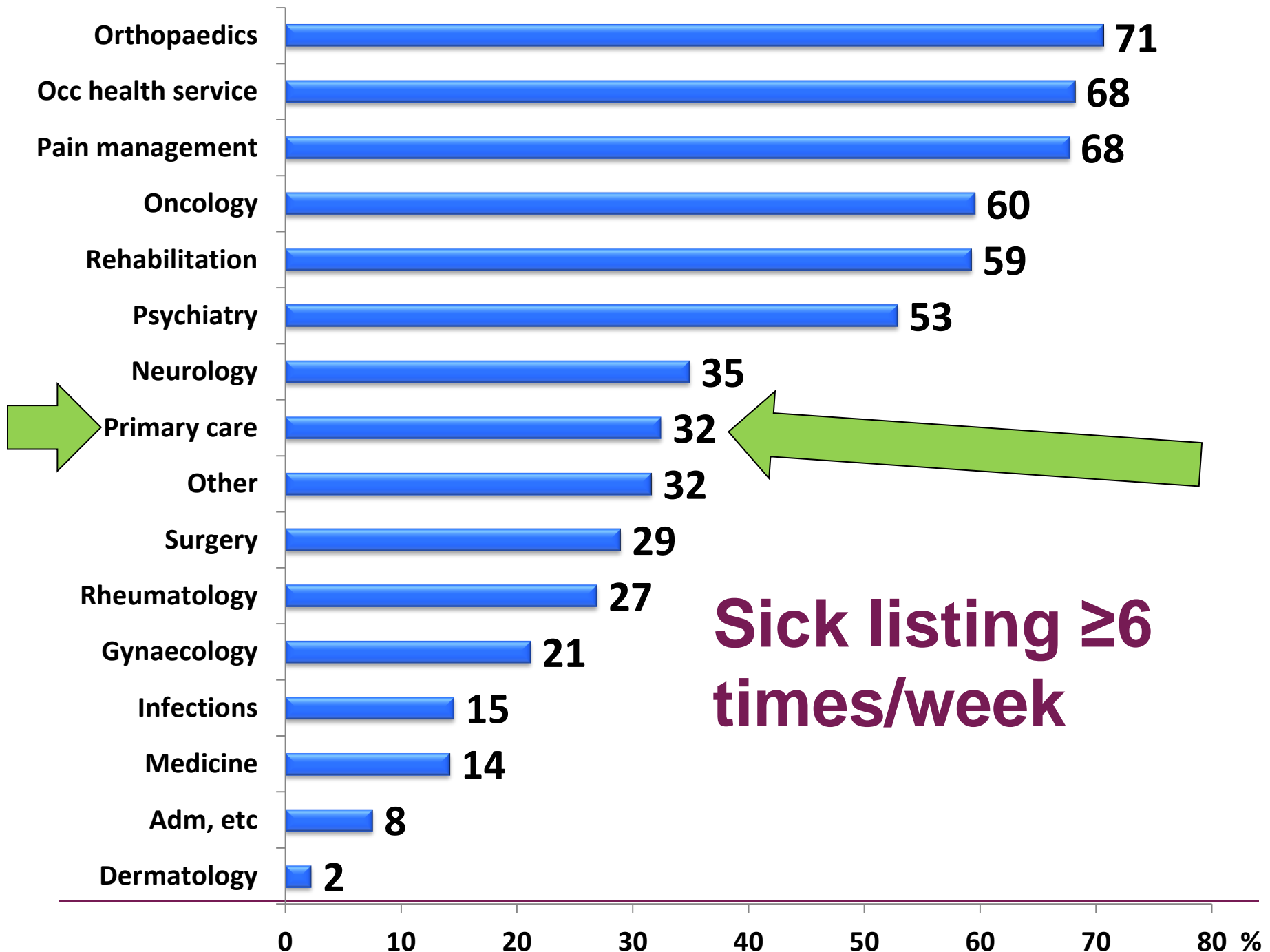


73%  
sickness certify

27% do not  
sickness certify

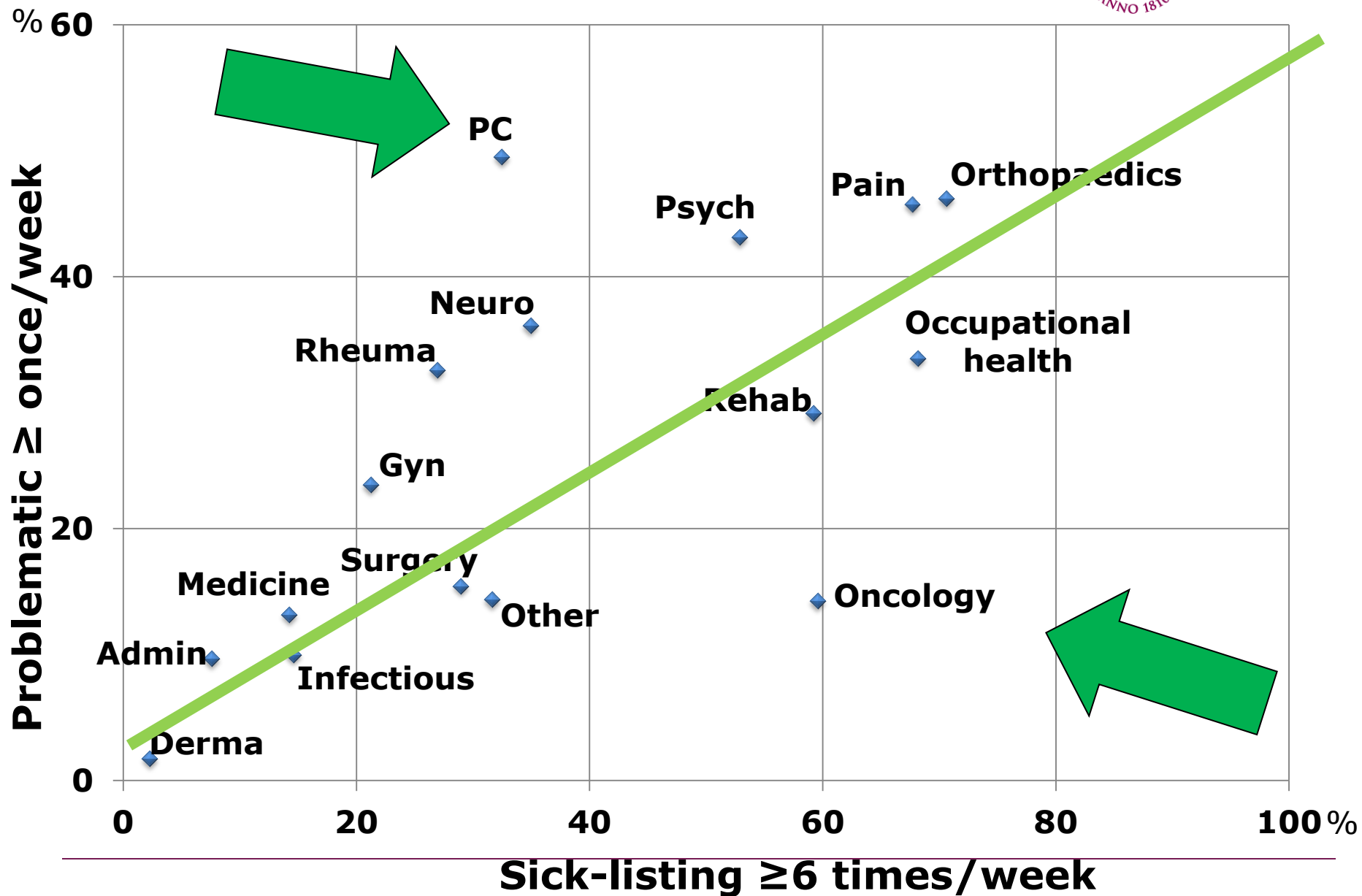
# Frequency (%) having sickness certification consultations



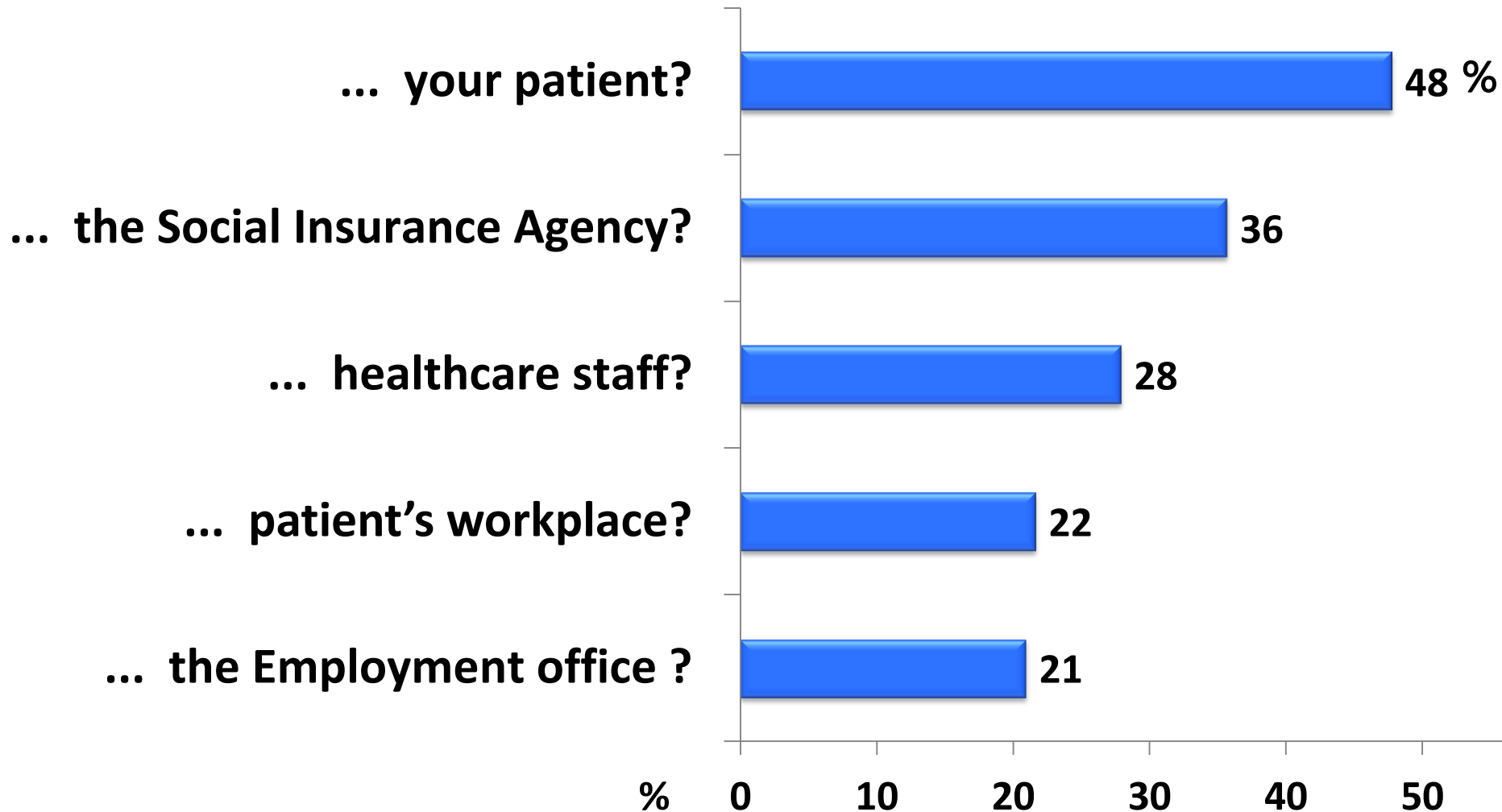


**Sick listing  $\geq 6$  times/week**

- **9% this is a large work-environmental problem**
  - **39% regarded sickness certification fairly or very problematic**
  - **32% experienced problems every week**
-



# The sick-leave guidelines facilitate contacts with...

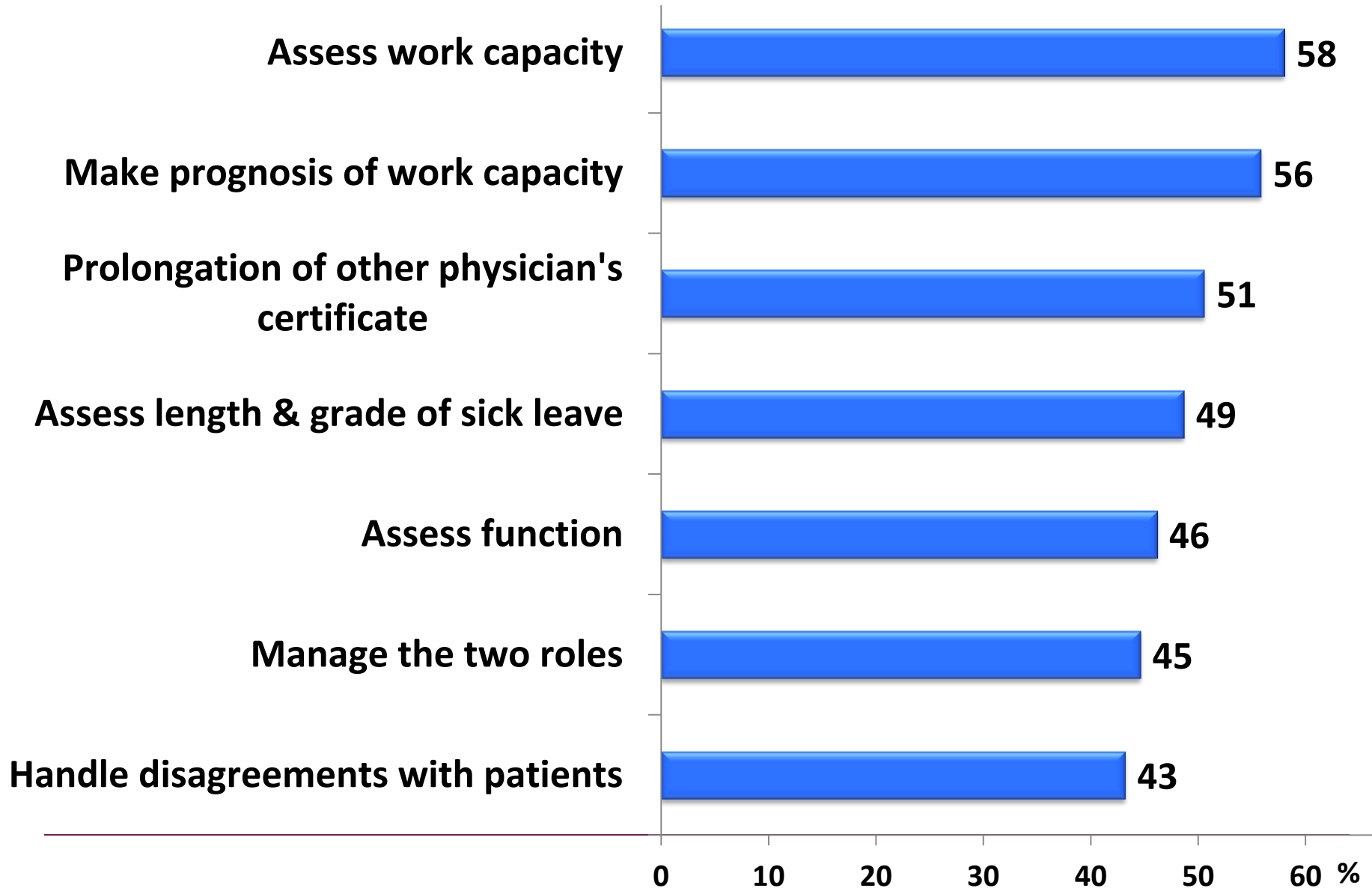




# Problems

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# Very or fairly problematic to



**The absolute majority of  
physicians (91%) want more  
competence in  
sickness insurance!**

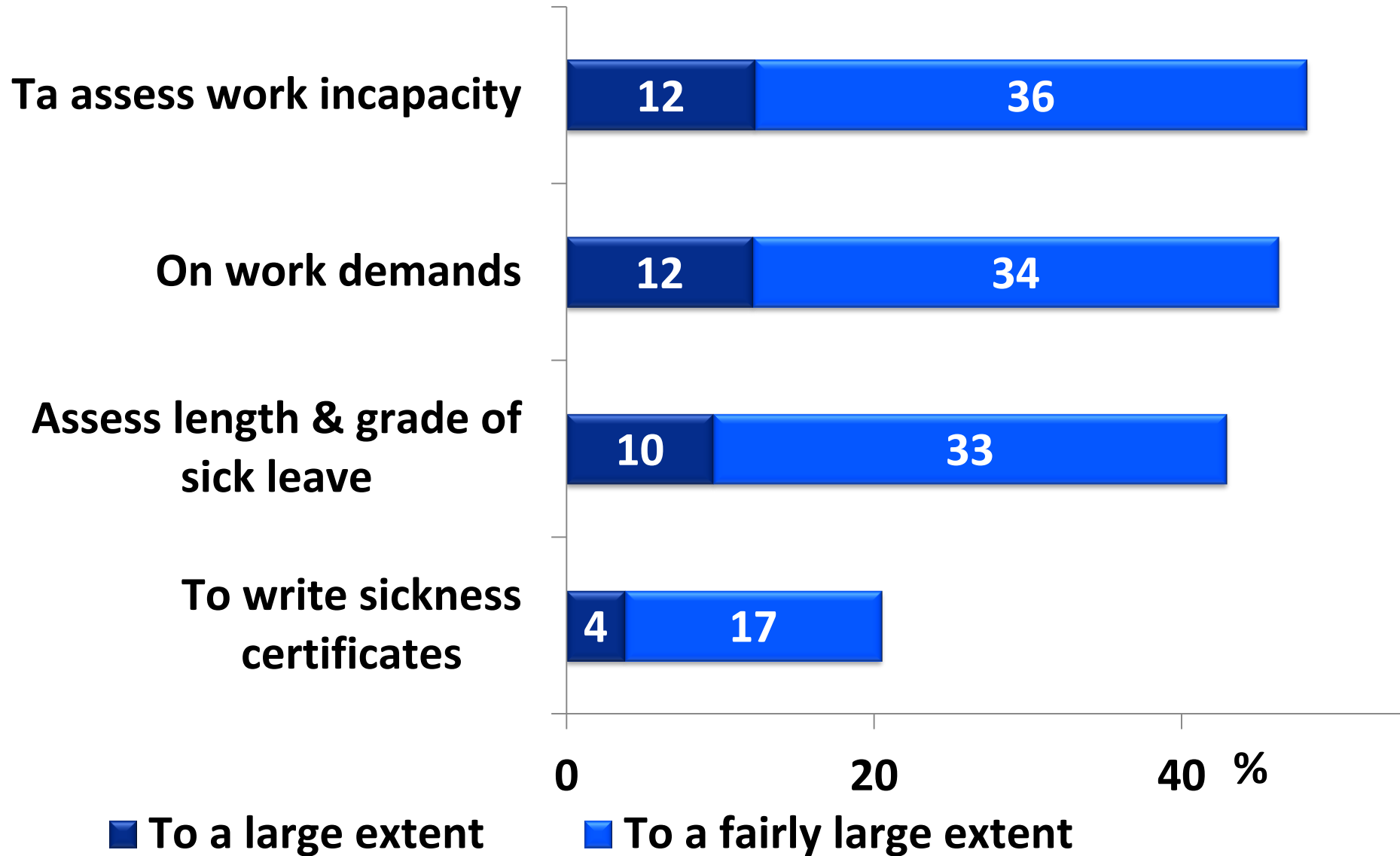
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**Two thirds experienced  
that their competence in  
insurance medicine was  
insufficient**

**More among GPs**

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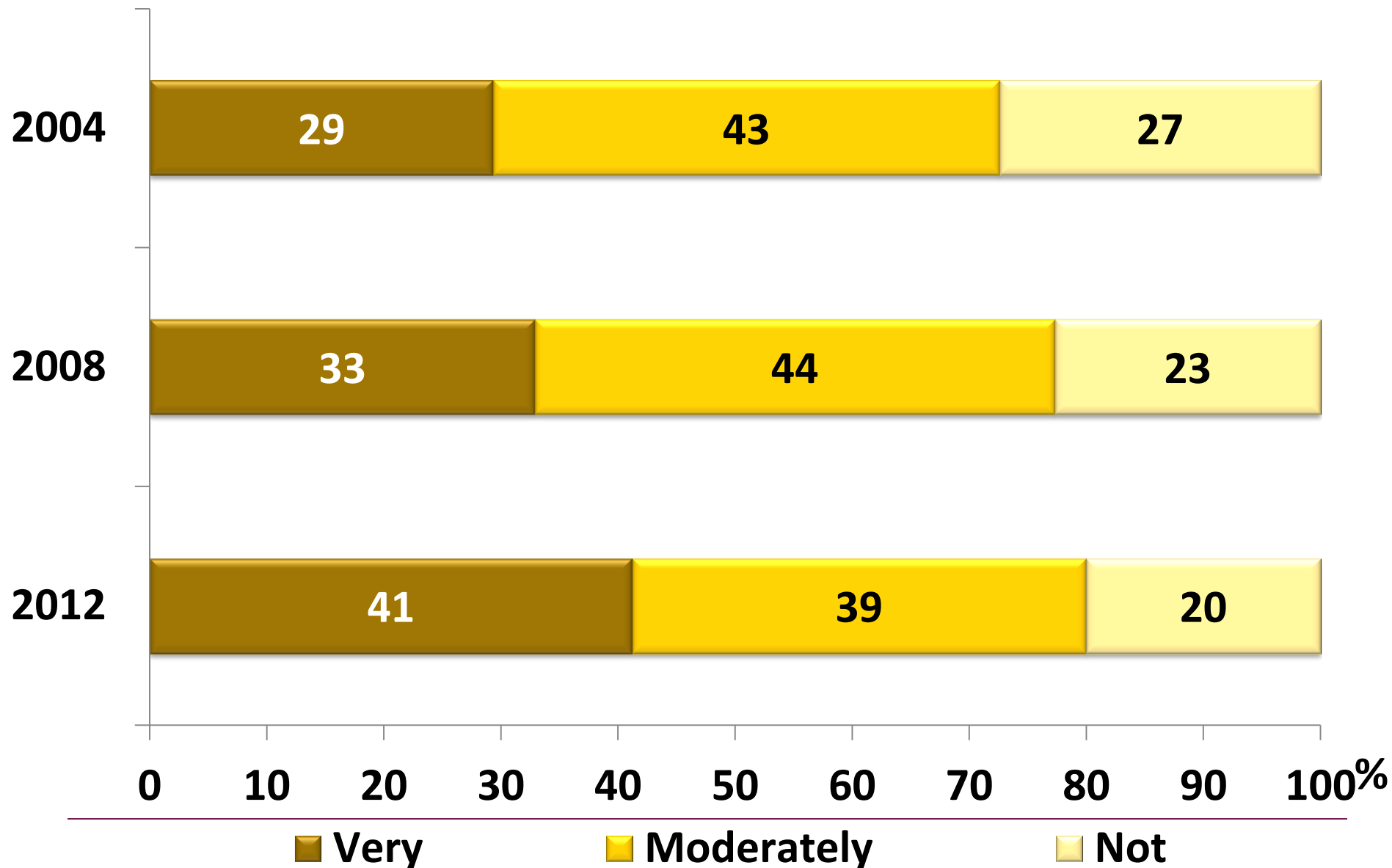
# Need more competence on how to



Better information to the public  
about the sickness insurance  
system: 50%

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# Coach/supervision

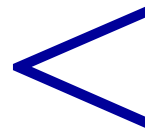


**Sick-leave certification:  
more and better studies  
are warranted!**



# Research

Sick leave



Health  
care

**Please, document - and  
publish!**

**Please, document - and  
publish!**



**Thank you!**

[kristina.alexanderson@ki.se](mailto:kristina.alexanderson@ki.se)

[www.ki.se/im](http://www.ki.se/im)