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Just Breathe: The Box Breathing Technique with NICU Nurses

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Background

- Research has demonstrated that nurses often care for others while neglecting themselves.
- Nurses are working at a constant pace with high stress decisions and situations.
- Box Breathing is a quick and effective self-care technique that Baystate Medical Center Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) nurses can use for self-care during their shift.
- When using the Box Breathing Technique, nurses will shift from a “fight or flight” response to a “rest and digest” response; they will be left feeling calmer and have improved decision-making capacity.

Purpose

- The purpose of this project is to decrease the perceived frequency of high stress moments among NICU staff both at work and at home by introducing and practicing the Box Breathing technique.

Goals/Objectives

1) Increase Awareness and Practice of Box Breathing Technique

- Provide training to all staff in the Box Breathing Technique.
- Encourage participation in practicing Box Breathing Technique at home or work within the 3-week period.

2) Improve Stress Management in NICU Staff

- Reduce perceived frequency of high stress moments at work and at home.
- Gather feedback from participants on the use and effectiveness of Box Breathing in reducing stress, using a post-project survey to evaluate the perceived impact on stress levels.

Methodology

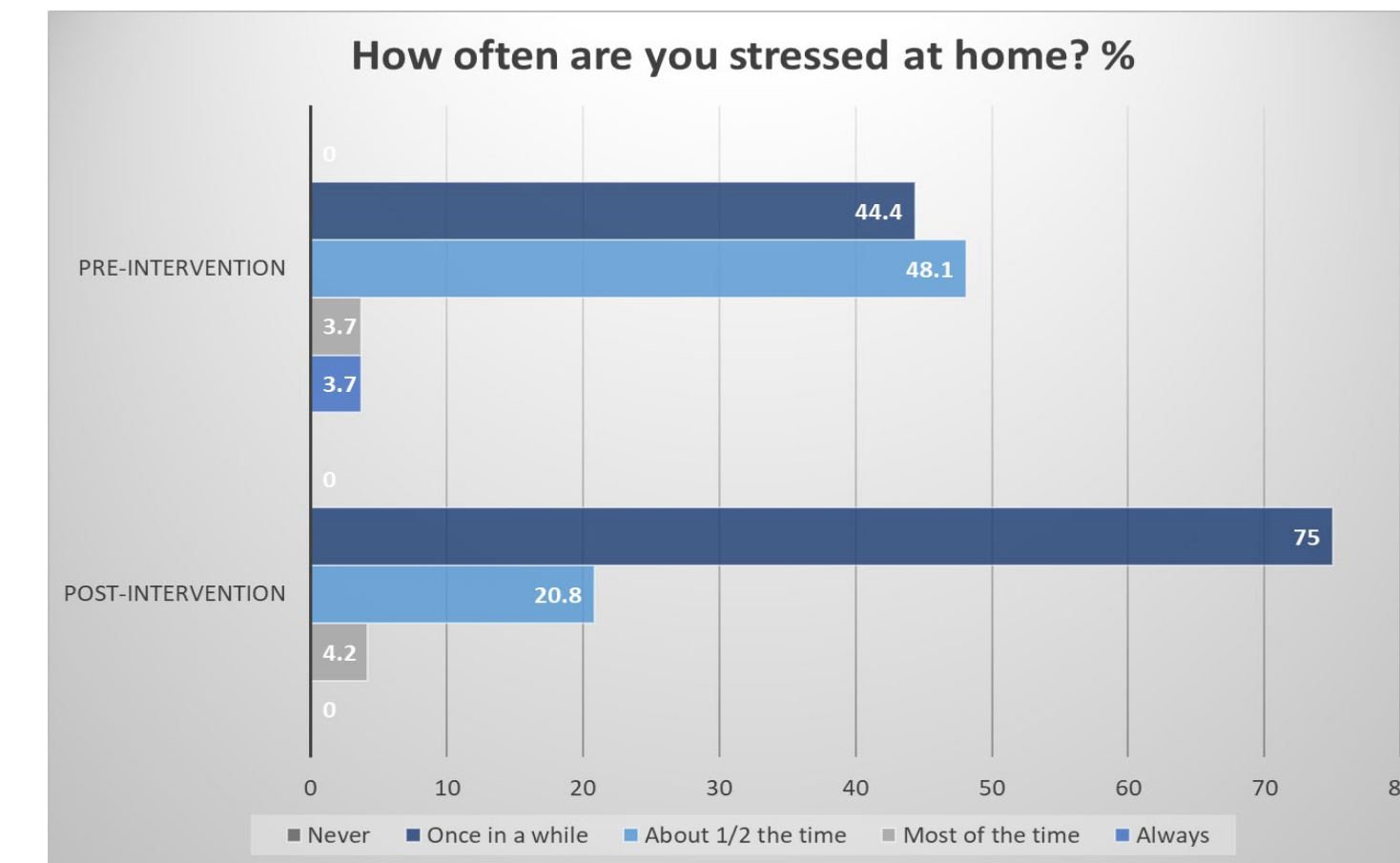
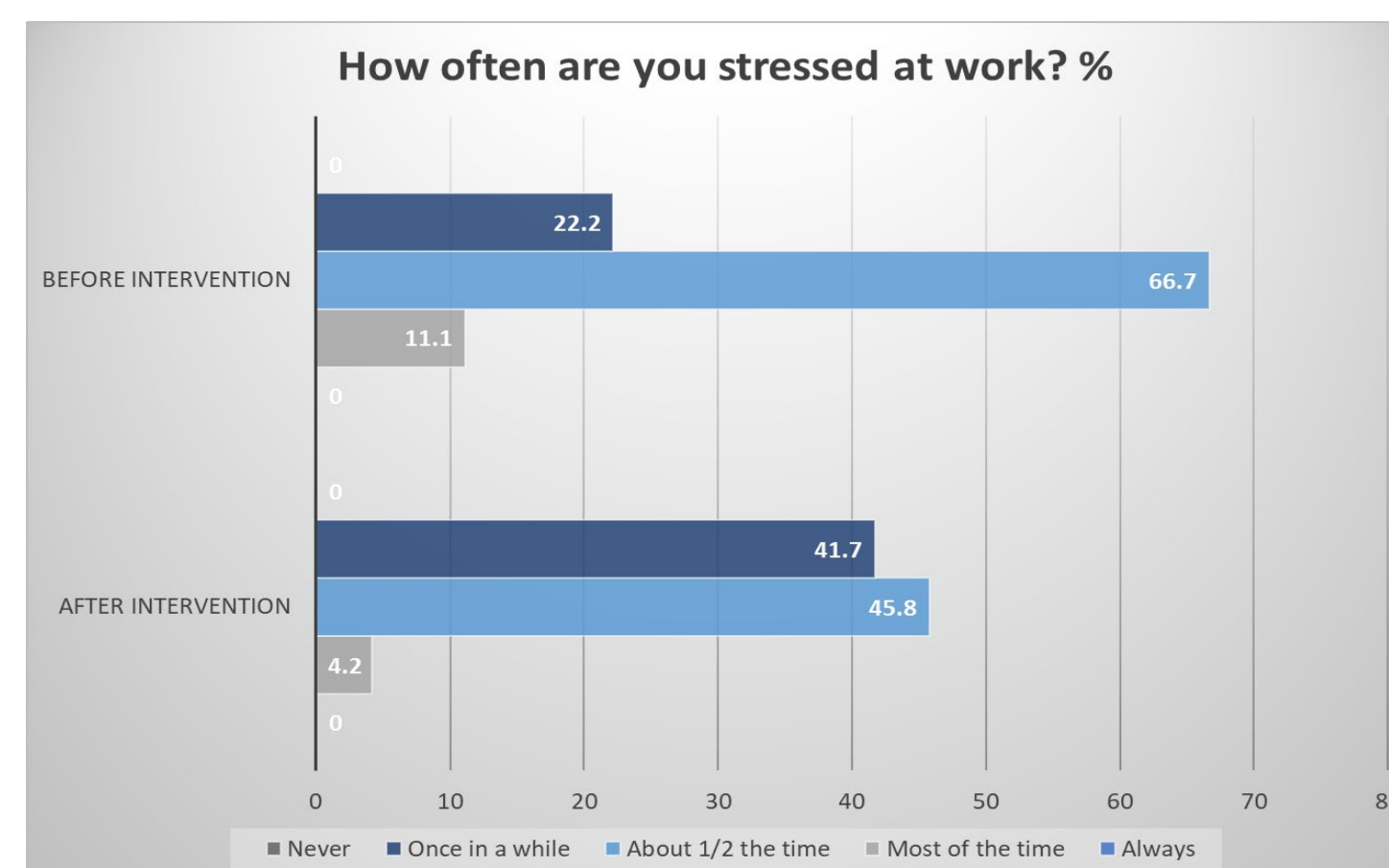
- This project was conducted in the NICU in January-February 2024.
- Participation was voluntary.
- Resources and educational materials about the Box Breathing Technique were created for the NICU nurses.
- An informational email was sent to all NICU nurses (108) inviting them to join the initiative.
- An instructional email was sent to the project participants.
- Educational posters were developed and displayed in the NICU staff areas.
- Box Breathing badges were printed and distributed to participants.
- Participants had 3 weeks to practice Box Breathing Technique at home/work.
- Pre- and post-intervention participant surveys focused on the frequency of stress at both work and home.

Outcomes

- 35 nurses participated in the project.
 - 27 nurses completed the pre-intervention survey
 - 24 nurses completed the post-intervention survey
- There was a 31% decrease in participants being stressed at work “About ½ the time.”
- There was a 57% decrease in participants being stressed at home “About ½ the time.”
- There was a 100% decrease in participants being stressed at home “Always.”
- Comments provided in the post-survey included:

“I truly love this breathing technique. It is quick and easy to do. It requires nothing physical. Just a moment in time. It’s exceptionally effective. It brings me back to center, calms me down every time.”

“I’ve been working on my breathing for a while and using it to center myself in therapy, but also in my everyday life. This was a great reminder for me to do it, as I usually forget!”



Conclusions

- The Box Breathing Technique provided the NICU nurses with a simple but effective proven breathing technique to reduce stress by resetting the nervous system, using one breath at a time.
- This project offered nurses a stress relieving intervention they can use anytime.
- After the project, NICU nurses felt less stressed during their work and home life.
- Conversations regarding stress in the NICU brought awareness to the importance of alleviating stress through self-care techniques/tools whenever possible.

Considerations for the future activities include:

- Offering education to the entire multidisciplinary group in NICU.
- Offering other types of breathing techniques for staff to try.
- Sharing the Box Breathing Technique with staff at Baystate Franklin Medical Center.

References

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