

“Skills before Pills”

Reducing prescribing of antidepressant medication with a Distress Pathway

Amanda Harris

“Differentiating short-term psychological distress from depression can be difficult. Diagnostic and management uncertainty may lead to the over diagnosis of depression and potentially inappropriate use of medicines when non-pharmacological interventions would be more effective.”

(BPAC 2019)

Use of Antidepressants in New Zealand



- **2017/18 there were 1.81m people prescribed antidepressants**
- **2021/22 there were 2.18m people prescribed antidepressants**
- **53% rise for youth.**
- **Almost 2x more likely for women**
- **2-3x higher for European population**
- **Reduction in people accessing specialist services**
- **Increase in Access and Choice services/Primary**

Te Hiringa Mahara (2023)

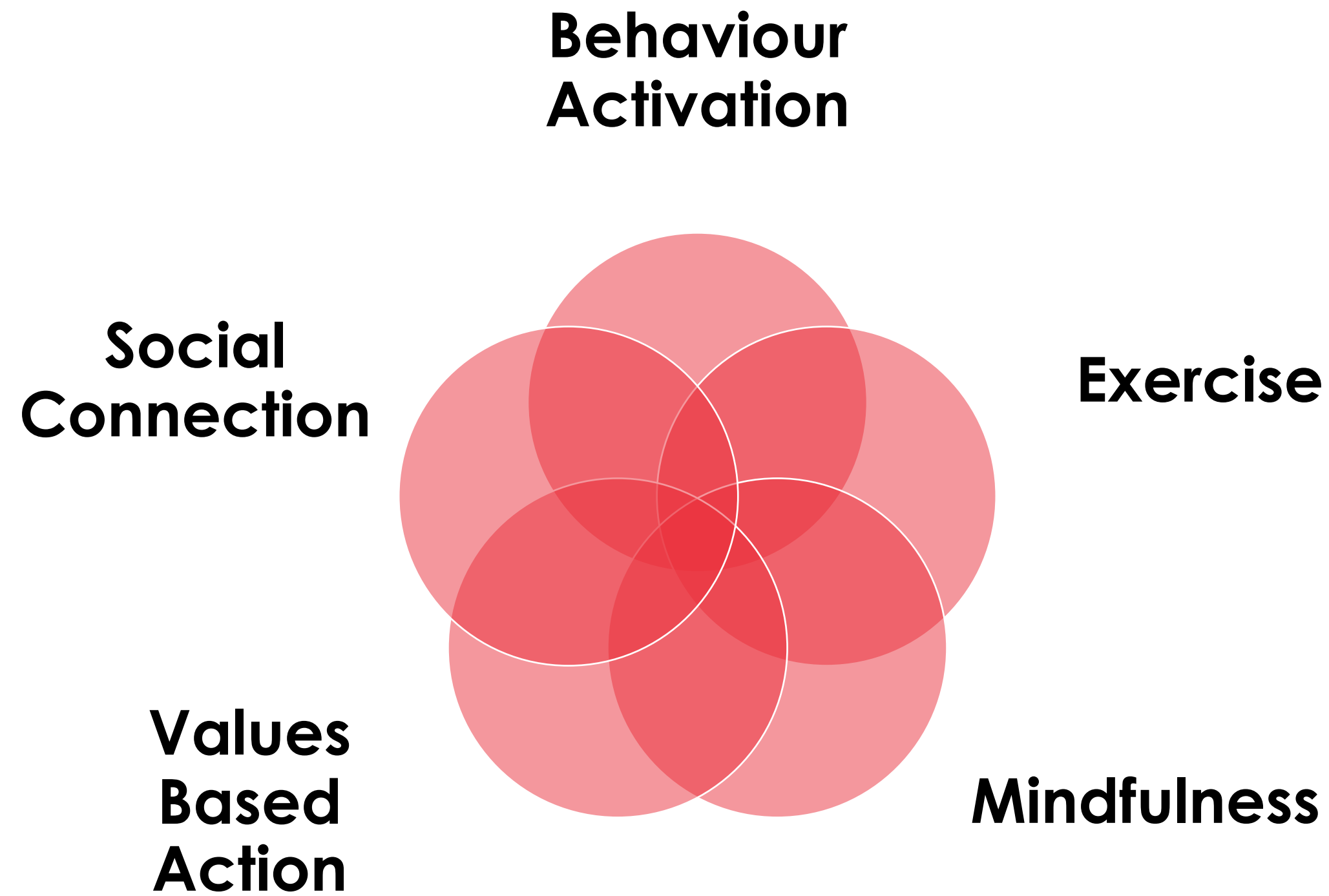
Skills before Pills

What's the evidence?

- **Antidepressant medication is most effective for severe depression and relative to a placebo effect for mild depression.**
- **Many people may score high on PHQ9 but this can reduce significantly by their next appointment when situational distress reduces.**
- **Guidelines (BPAC, NICE) suggest non pharmacological interventions before prescribing.**
- **US study showed no significant difference in symptoms after 2 years for people taking antidepressants compared to without medication. (mild – moderate depression)**

Skills before Pills

What's the evidence?



Distress Pathway - Clinic Population

Pukekohe Family Doctors

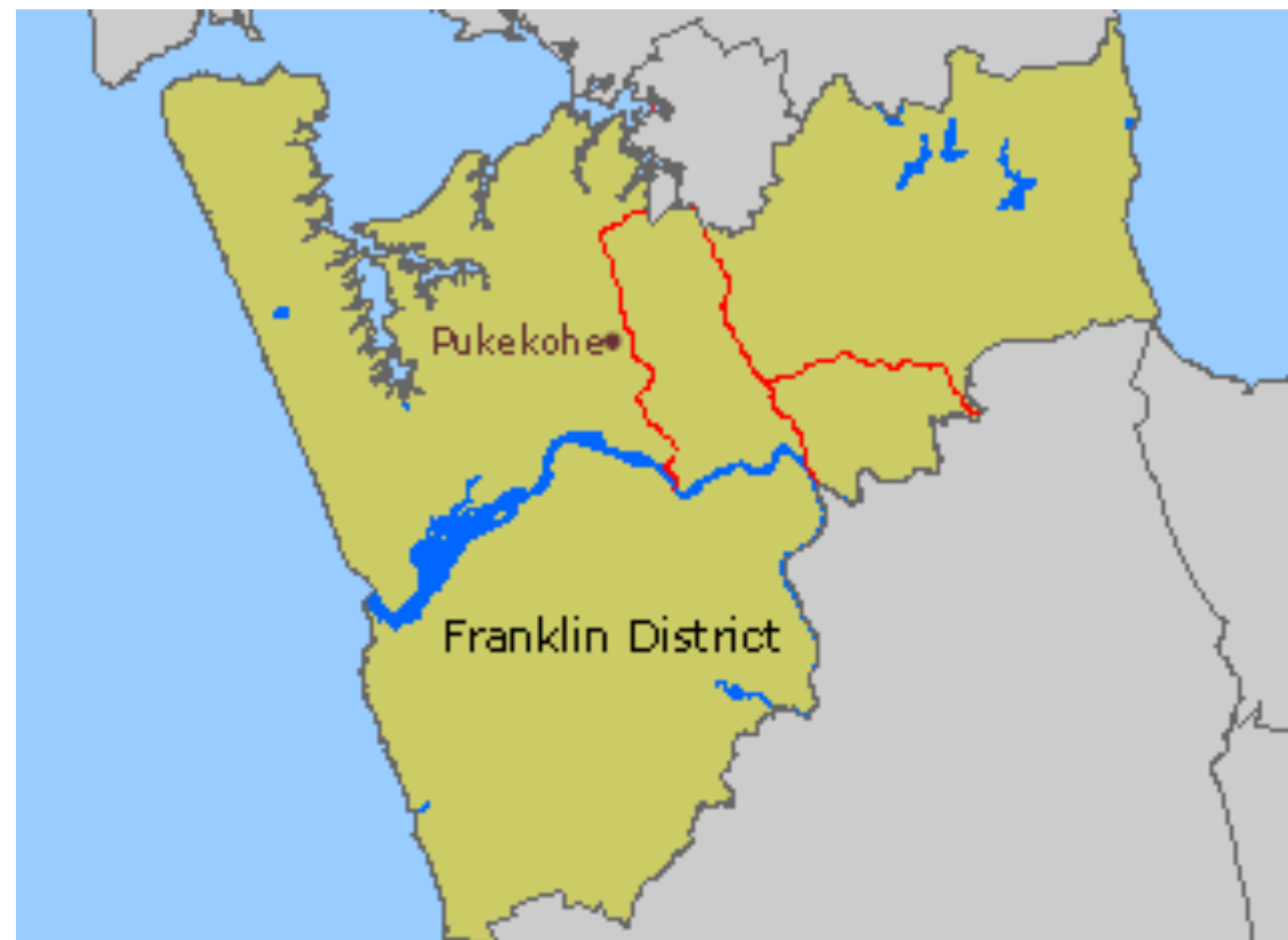
Franklin district – Deep South Auckland!

Clinic population of approx. 4000

5 gp's & 1 nurse

Maori 11%

Youth 33% (under 24)



Anti depressants prescribed: 10%

Diagnosis of Depression: 1%

Diagnosis of Anxiety: 2.5%

Pathway Statement:

Reduce prescribing of anti-depressant medication as a first line intervention for managing mild depression/anxiety and/or situational emotional distress.

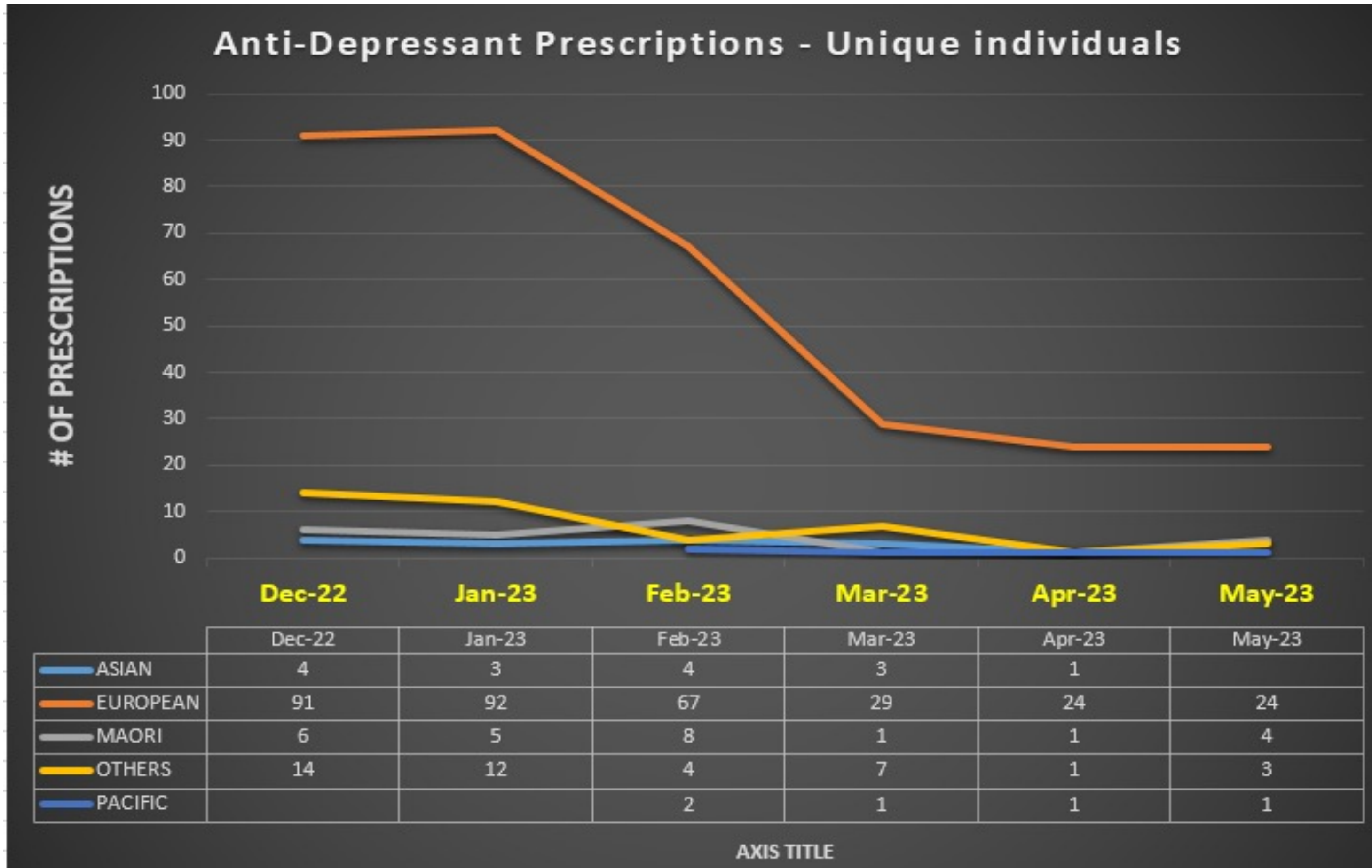
Using a skills before pills philosophy and utilisation of Health Improvement Practitioner for behavioural health interventions, there will be a decrease in prescribing of anti-depressant medication where there is no clinical indication of severe depression.

Pathway Process: (Adapted from BPAC)

GP:

- Label of 'distress' or 'acute reaction to stress'
- Complete PHQ9/GAD7.
- Enroll onto Wellness Support (Counties Manukau region)
- If currently on an antidepressant medication, leave in the short term.
- If not, do not prescribe at first visit (unless clinically indicated)
- Warm handover to HIP.
- Whaiora to have at least 2x consults with HIP and f/u GP.
- If no improvement in 2 – 4 weeks, then consider prescribing.

- HIP – Usual practice and offer therapy, mindfulness course, Wise Minds, men's group or Manage Better group.



March to July:

Did each individual have the following?

- **Recorded PHQ9 or GAD7**
- **Enrollment onto Wellness Support**
- **Introduction to HIP**
- **Consult with HIP**

Very few people had all 4!

- **Some variation in process between GP's**
- **One GP didn't know about Wellness Support**
- **Variations in how Whaiora are introduced to HIP (warm handover, asked to book at reception, contact HIP with NHI)**

Future Considerations



- **Monthly feedback to GP's re prescribing and their use of HIP/Screening/Wellness Support.**
- **Data collation of Whaiora on the pathway who's treatment does result in prescribing.**
- **Handovers to HIP for Whaiora requesting repeat prescriptions and have been on medication for over 12 months.**
- **Extend pathway to larger clinic with more culturally diverse population.**

Arroll, Bruce 2019 Distress versus depression/anxiety.

<https://www.nzdoctor.co.nz/article/news/distress-versus-depressionanxiety-allow-patients-improve-their-life-without-meds>

BPAC 2019: Depression or distress? Examining SSRI prescribing in primary care

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence 2009: Depression in adults: recognition and management.

Te Huringa Tuarua 2023: Mental Health and Addiction Service Monitoring Report.

