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Hours worked by Gen Y GPs.

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In late March 2012 the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare released 'Medical workforce 2010'. It included information about the average number of hours worked per week by 'employed medical practitioners', which includes 'clinicians (93%)' and medical practitioners who are not employed as clinicians (7%).[1]

The AIHW report (Table 3.5) shows that those GPs who were classed as 'clinicians' worked an average 43.0 hours per week. It was reported that (Figure 3.4) among both male and female 'employed medical practitioners', those aged 20–34 years worked the highest number of hours per week (about 45 for women and 50 for men), and those aged 65 years and over the fewest number.[1] However, hours worked per week were not reported by age and sex for GP clinicians.

One media article intimated that the reported age-sex average hours worked could be applied to the GP workforce—"*The stereotype of Gen Y GPs rushing to the practice door when the clock strikes five has been challenged by a new report showing young male doctors work longer hours than their older peers*".[2]

We tested this assumption with data from the BEACH program Jan 2009–December 2011. The samples of GPs who participate in the BEACH program each year have repeatedly been shown to be representative of all GPs practicing in that year.[3]

In the BEACH 'GP Profile' questionnaire we ask each participating GP:

> ***'How many direct patient care hours do you work per week****? (include hours of direct patient care, instructions, counselling etc, and other services such as referrals, prescriptions phone calls etc).'*[3]

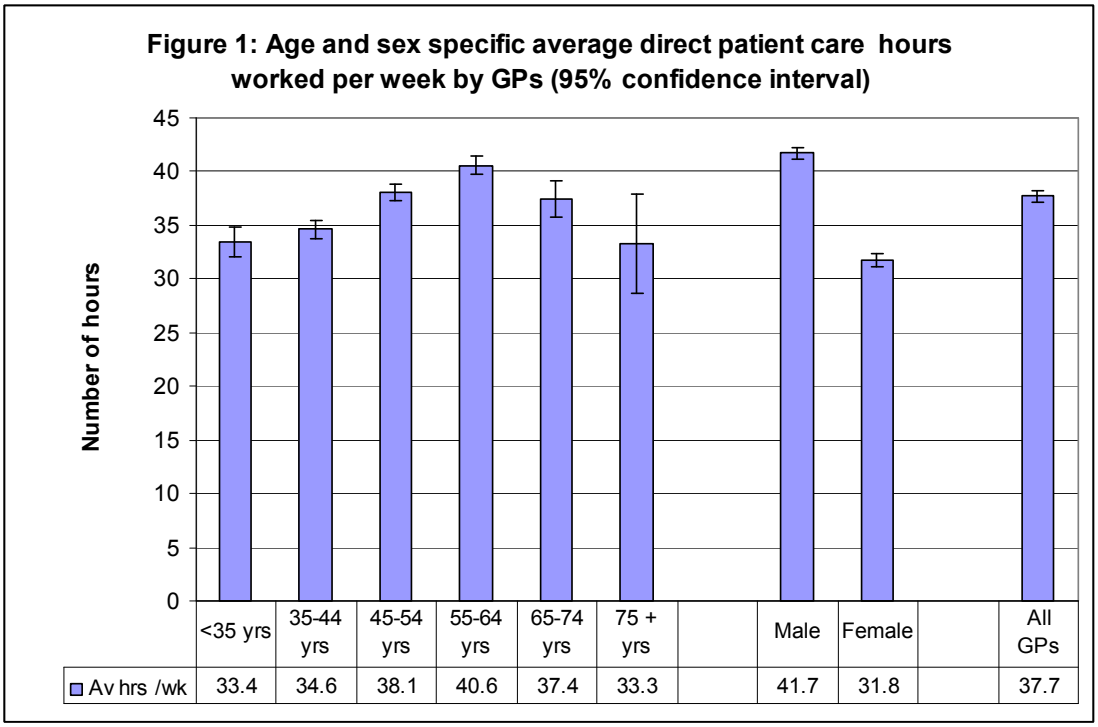
Results

Of the 2,948 GPs participating over that period, 2,890 (98.0%) provided details of their age, sex and average working hours.

Figure 1 show that the average clinical hours worked by the sampled GPs was 37.7 hours, males averaging 41.7 and females 31.8 hours.

GPs aged less than 35 years, and those aged 75 years and over, on average, worked the least number of clinical hours (33.4 and 33.3 per week respectively). Those aged between 55 and 64 years reported the highest number of clinical hours worked (40.6.per week), significantly more hours than all other age groups.

The pattern of clinical working hours by age of GP demonstrated by the BEACH data differs markedly from that reported for 'employed medical practitioners' in the AIHW Medical Workforce report.



It is clear that, far from Gen Y GPs working 45-50 hours per week, these young GPs (<35 years) are working significantly fewer clinical hours than GPs aged 45–54, 55-64 and 65–74 years.

It is likely that the high number of hours worked by Gen Y in the AIHW results is because 'medical practitioners' includes a large number of Registrars working in a hospital environment.

There are limitations to this comparison with the AIHW report. The BEACH survey asks about 'direct patient care hours'. In contrast, the working hours for 'Medical Practitioners' included all practitioners and their work in any field of medicine (including research etc).

Nevertheless, we have demonstrated that while Gen Y 'Medical Practitioners' as a group work longer hours than the older age groups,[1] the same cannot be said for Gen Y GPs.

We hope this Byte clarifies the work practice patterns of GPs versus the work patterns of 'Medical Practitioners' as a whole.

Suggested citation

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