

SAND abstract No. 22 from the BEACH program 2000–2001

Subject: Asthma – prevalence, severity and management

Organisation supporting this study: GP Statistics and Classification Unit (GPSCU)

Issues: This sub-study investigated the prevalence of asthma in general practice patients, and the severity of asthma using the National Asthma Campaign's severity classification. For those asthmatic patients, management of asthma, the effectiveness and adverse effects of treatment were examined.

Sample: 5,495 respondents from 95 GPs; data collection periods: 28/11/00-15/01/01.

Method: Detailed in the paper entitled 'SAND Method' on this website (<http://www.fmrc.org.au/beach.htm>). Levels of severity of asthma for children and adults were listed on a patient card with descriptions of each level. Severity classes for children included infrequent episodic, frequent episodic, and persistent. For adults, the severity classes were very mild, mild, moderate and severe. The severity levels were adapted from the NAC Asthma Management Handbook 1998.

Summary of results

The age–sex distribution of the respondents was similar to the distribution for BEACH overall, with the majority (58.5%) of patients being female.

The prevalence of asthma among the respondents was 12.8% (95% CI: 11.4–14.3). Asthma was significantly more prevalent in patients aged 5 to 14 (22.2%, 95% CI: 14.4–29.9) than in the total sample. Of the 118 children (age <18) with asthma who responded to the severity question, 74.6% had infrequent asthma, 20.3% had frequent and 5.1% had persistent asthma. Among 543 adults (age ≥18) with asthma who responded to the severity question, 70.0% had very mild or mild asthma, 24.5% had moderate asthma and 5.5% had severe asthma.

Of the 132 asthmatic children (age <18) 39.4% had an asthma action/management plan, while 27.1% of asthmatic adults (age ≥18) (n=547) had such a plan. Nine out of ten patients with asthma (90.8%, n=704) were taking medications for asthma. Of asthma patients, 82.0% used reliever medications, 48.7% preventer medications and 7.8% controller medications.

The distribution of treatment regimen for asthma varied with asthma severity levels. Relievers alone was the most common regimen among the 88 children with infrequent asthma (53.4%) and among the 232 adults with very mild asthma (62.1%). The combination of relievers and preventers was most common among the children with frequent asthma (15/24), children with persistent asthma (4/6), adults with mild asthma (46.6%, 69/148), adults with moderate asthma (63.9%, 85/133), and adults with severe asthma (63.3%, 19/30).

For the 614 respondents taking medications for their asthma, GPs rated the effectiveness of the current treatment regimen as 5 (effective) in 54.9% of cases. Reliever medications alone (270 patients) had the highest proportion (64.1%) of a '5' rating for the effectiveness of current treatment regimen. Of the 602 patients on asthma medications, 82.9% had no adverse effect from current treatment regimen. Patients only taking reliever medications, recorded the highest proportion (90.0%, n=259) of 'no adverse effect' of current treatment regimen.

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