

SAND abstract No. 37 from the BEACH program 2001–02

Subject: Prevalence of common morbidities in patients encountered in general practice

Organisation supporting this study: General Practice Statistics & Classification Unit.

Issues: The prevalence of significant morbidity affecting general practice patients irrespective of whether or not the morbidity was managed at the encounter; the number of times general practice patients consult a GP annually.

Sample: 11,342 respondents from 378 GPs; data collection period: 21/8/2001–31/12/2001 and 22/1/2002–30/3/2002.

Method: Detailed in the paper entitled 'SAND Method' on this website (<http://www.fmrc.org.au/beach.htm>).

Visit frequency and morbidity were directly standardised against the known age-sex distribution of all patients who attended general practice in Australia between April 2000 and March 2001.

Summary of results

The age-sex distribution of patients was similar to the distribution of the total BEACH sample with the majority (59.1%) being female. Patients aged 25–44 years (26.7%) or 45–64 years (25.1%) accounted for more than half of the sample, with the mean patient age being 46 years.

The most common morbidities were hypertension (19.5% of respondents), depression (10.2%), lipid disorder (9.1%) and asthma (8.0%). After direct standardisation the estimated prevalence rates for the general practice population were hypertension 13.5% (95% CI:12.5–14.4), depression 9.5% (95% CI:8.6–10.3), asthma 8.8% (95% CI:8.1–9.5) and lipid disorders 6.9% (95% CI:6.2–7.6).

The respondents attended a GP on average 8.8 times per year. The age-sex standardised average was 7.8 visits per year (95% CI:7.4–8.2), increasing among older adults. The standardised mean number of annual visits for all reasons was 13.0 (95% CI:12.0–14.1) for patients with diagnosed diabetes, 12.6 (95% CI:11.7–13.5) for patients with depression, 9.2 (95% CI:8.5–9.9) for patients with asthma and 6.1 (95% CI:5.5–6.6) for patients with current upper respiratory tract infection.

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