

## **SAND abstract No. 39 from the BEACH program 2002–03**

### **Subject: Severity of asthma, medications and management**

**Organisation supporting this study:** AstraZeneca (Australia)

**Issues:** The prevalence and severity of asthma managed in the general practice patient population; the use of asthma medications; asthma management tools; and patient confidence in predicting changes in their asthma.

**Sample:** 3,070 encounters from 105 GPs; data collection period 02/04/2002 – 06/05/2002

**Method:** Detailed in the paper entitled 'SAND Method: 2002-03' on the FMRC website ([http://www.fmrc.org.au/publications/SAND\\_abstracts.htm](http://www.fmrc.org.au/publications/SAND_abstracts.htm)).

Asthma severity was established using the National Asthma Campaign's severity classification, which was provided on a card to participating GPs. This severity classification differs for children (aged <18 years) and adults.

### **Summary of results**

The age-sex distribution of respondents was similar to the distribution for all BEACH (general practice) encounters, with the majority (59.9%) of patients being female. The prevalence of asthma among the respondents was 13.9% (95% CI: 12.0-15.7, n=426). Patients aged 5–14 years had the highest prevalence of asthma (26.3%, 95% CI: 15.1-37.4), this was significantly higher than all other age groups (12.9%, 95% CI: 11.0–14.8).

Among 312 adult patients (18 years and over) with asthma, 35.9% had very mild, 31.4% had mild, 27.2% had moderate and 5.5% had severe asthma. Of the 97 children (aged <18 years) with asthma, 82.5% had infrequent asthma, 15.5% had frequent and 2.1% persistent asthma.

Of the 426 patients with asthma, 87.8% were currently taking asthma medications, at an average rate of 142.7 medications per 100 asthma patients. Reliever medications were the most common medication used to treat asthma, being taken by 85.9% of asthma patients. These were followed by preventer medications (34.5%), combination medications (16.7%) and symptom controllers (5.2%). The use of relievers alone (37.8%) was the most common treatment regimen for asthma patients, followed by a combination of relievers and preventers (24.4%). The most common medication taken for asthma was salbutamol which was used by 70.0% of patients with asthma, followed by fluticasone/salmeterol (16.7%). Of the 298 patients using salbutamol, 62.8% had been using it for more than 6 months. Almost one third (30.4%) of patients reported decreased use of relievers in the past 6 months.

Among the asthma patients, 150 (35.2%) used at least one asthma management tool (note that multiple response was allowed), 120 (28.2%) had an asthma action/management plan, 50 (11.7%) used asthma symptom diary cards, and 43 (10.1%) used asthma drug diary cards. Of the 108 asthma action/management plan users who responded to the question about the frequency of use of this plan, 66.7% reported using it less than monthly, 22.2% monthly, 8.3% weekly and 2.8% daily.

The patients with asthma were asked to rate their confidence in predicting changes in asthma due to weather, exercise etc. on a scale of 1 (confident) to 5 (not confident). The mean score of confidence was 2.5 for the 398 asthma patients who responded to the question.

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