

SAND abstract No. 48 from the BEACH program 2002–03

Subject: Asthma prevalence and management

Organisation supporting this study: Department of Health and Ageing

Issues: This study investigated the prevalence of asthma in general practice patients; medications taken for asthma management; severity of asthma for adults and children at commencement of Long Acting Beta Agonist (LABA); reason for prescribing a combination product (LABA plus inhaled corticosteroid (ICS)); changes in asthma control since taking combination product; patient preference for product type; patient use of spacer device.

Sample: 2,686 encounters from 92 GPs; data collection period: 24/9/2002 – 28/10/2002.

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

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 14.5% (95% CI: 12.7-16.2). Prevalence was significantly higher among patients aged 5 to 14 years (24.0%, 95% CI: 17.3-30.7) compared with the patients from the other age groups (13.7%, 95% CI: 12.0-15.5).

Of the 382 patients who answered the question about current medication, 29.8% were taking the combination LABA/ICS product, 22.3% were taking inhaled ICS alone, 3.7% were using both LABA and ICS (2 single drugs), and 3.9% were using LABA alone. The remaining respondents (40.3%) were not taking these medications.

Of the 16 children taking LABA (single or combination), 8 had frequent asthma, 4 had persistent asthma and 4 had infrequent asthma, when LABA was commenced. Of the 113 adults taking LABA (single or combination), 59.3% had moderate asthma, 20.4% had severe asthma, and 20.4% had very mild to mild asthma, when LABA was commenced.

There were 109 responses to 'purpose of prescribing' the combination product. For these, 34.9% (n=38) replaced 2 products with one, 30.3% (n=33) commenced both medications at the same time, 28.4% (n=31) added LABA to therapy, and 6.4% (n=7) added ICS to therapy. Asthma control level was 'improved' for 84.4%, 'same as before' for 12.8%, and 'worse' for the remaining 2.8%.

The majority (52.3%, n=193) of patients preferred the combination product, 21.8% the single ingredient product, and the remaining 25.9% had no preference.

The question on the use of a spacer device was answered by 176 patients to whom it was relevant. Of these, 52.3% reported that they never used a spacer device and the remainder were equally likely to report its use 'always' or 'sometimes' (23.1% in each case).

Updated 28/06/06 to include results of spacer device usage question, inadvertently omitted.

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