

SAND abstract No. 50 from the BEACH program 2002–03

Subject: Risk factors in patients on lipid lowering medications

Organisation supporting this study: Commonwealth Department of Health & Ageing

Issues: The prevalence of lipid lowering medication use among patients attending general practice; at commencement of therapy – age, prevalence of existing cardiovascular disease, prevalence of risk factors (smoking, total cholesterol, HDL, blood pressure); and was family history a major influence on commencement?

Sample: 2,701 respondents from 94 GPs; data collection period: 29/10/2002–2/12/2002.

Summary of results

The age distribution of respondents did not differ from the distribution for all BEACH encounters. Female patients were over-represented in this SAND sub-sample (63.8%).

Of the 2,701 respondents, 11.2% (n=302) were currently using lipid lowering medication.

Lipid lowering medication use was most common in patients of 65–74 years (30.0%) and significantly more likely in male respondents (14.6%, 95% CI: 12.1-17.1)

Of those on lipid-lowering medications 47.8% had existing cardiovascular disease, 39.5% were overweight/obese, 34.7% had family history of heart disease, 22.3% had diabetes, and 2.1% had renal failure. The remaining 12.7% had none of the listed risk factors. (Multiple response was allowed.)

The GP indicated that the patient's family history of heart disease was a major factor in their decision to prescribe the lipid lowering medication for 28.7% of the 275 patients about whom a response was recorded.

The patient's age at commencement of lipid therapy was recorded for 265 patients currently using lipid lowering medication. Of these, about half (48.3%) started lipid therapy when aged between 45 and 64 years, one third (31.3%) commenced when aged between 65 and 74 years, and 11.7% when aged 75 years or over. The mean age at the commencement of lipid medication was 60.9 years.

Of 287 respondents currently using lipid medication for whom smoking status was recorded, more than one third (38.3%) smoked tobacco at the time of commencing medication but only 11.0% were current smokers.

After missing data were removed, at commencement of lipid therapy: mean total cholesterol (n=287) was 7.0 mmol/L; mean HDL (n=181) was 1.4 mmol/L; mean systolic blood pressure (n=237) was 140 mm Hg; mean diastolic blood pressure (n=237) was 83 mmHg.

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