

SAND abstract No. 6 from the BEACH program 1999–2000

Subject: Employment status and workers' compensation claims

Organisation: National Occupational Health and Safety Commission

Issues: Employment status; work related problems and workers' compensation claims

Sample: 8,833 encounters from 221 GPs; data collection period: 21/9/99 – 26/11/99

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

Summary of results

The age–sex distribution of the respondents was similar to the expected distribution of general practice patients, with 51% in the 25–64 age group and the majority of patients (59%) being female.

Of the 8,833 respondents, 52.3% were not in the labour force. Those not in the labour force were mainly retirees (27.0%) and those engaged in home duties (12.9%).

The problems managed at encounter were analysed in relation to total encounters, employment status and workers' compensation claims. Hypertension was the most common problem managed in the total sample (at a rate of 7.7 per 100 encounters, CI: 6.7–8.7). Upper respiratory tract infection (URTI) was the most common problem managed for employed persons (6.4, CI: 5.0–7.7), though this rate was lower than the URTI rate in the total sample. Common problems managed at a higher rate for employed persons than for all persons were back complaints (3.2 per 100 encounters, CI: 0.7 – 5.6 compared with 2.9, CI: 2.1–3.6) and sprains/strains (2.6, CI: 0.8 – 4.4 compared with 1.7, CI: 1.0 – 2.5). Overlapping confidence intervals show no significant differences were found.

Back complaint was managed at the higher rate of 3.9 per 100 encounters with self-employed persons, compared with a rate of 2.9 per 100 total encounters. Malignant neoplasms of the skin were also more often managed among the self employed, at a rate of 2.8 per 100 encounters (compared with 0.9 per 100 encounters in the total data), but numbers were small at this level of analysis precluding statistical comparisons.

Of the 8,833 encounters, 272 (3.1%) included the management of at least one problem that was work related. A workers' compensation claim was made for 182 (67.0%) of the work related encounters. Back complaint was the most common problem managed at an encounter where a workers' compensation claim was made.

Of the 90 respondents who stated they had a work related problem but did not make a claim, only 50 gave a reason why a claim was not made. The most common reason given was 'not serious enough' (22.0%). The 'other' category made up 48% of reasons for not claiming, and an examination of this category showed that most of the reasons given (18% of all reasons) were that respondents were 'self employed'. Another 18% of patients gave 'not covered by employer' as their reason for not making a claim.

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