

SAND abstract No. 7 from the BEACH program 1999–2000

Subject: Health service utilisation, lifestyle status and chronicity

Organisation supporting this study: Commonwealth Department of Veterans' Affairs

Issues: GP visits; hospital admissions; medications taken; independent living; institutionalisation

Sample: 2,124 encounters from 106 GPs; data collection period: 8/6/99 – 9/7/99

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

Summary of results

The age–sex distribution of patients was similar to that of the total BEACH sample.

At least one prescribed medication had been taken routinely in the past six months by 69.6% of the respondents. Between one and three medications had been taken routinely by 47.0% of respondents. Almost two thirds of respondents (60.8%) had routinely taken at least one over the counter (OTC) medication. Relatively more older patients were routinely taking either prescribed and/or OTC medications. The proportion of females who routinely took at least one prescribed medication was 74.2% compared to 63.1% of males. Similarly, a greater proportion of females (43.3%) than of males (32.3%) had routinely taken at least one OTC medication over the past six months.

The majority of respondents (52.1%) had visited a GP on between 1 and 4 occasions in the preceding 6 months. Again, elderly patients reported more GP visits, with 41.5% of patients aged over 75 years visiting the GP between 5 and 8 times. At least one admission to hospital in the previous six months was reported by 18.0% of respondents. Allied health consultations were reported by 17.3% of respondents, while 37.2% had visited a specialist at least once in the past 6 months.

Of the 2,124 respondents, 11.5% were dependent on a carer, with a high proportion of patients aged 75 and over being dependent. Almost 3.0% of respondents resided in an institution.

At least one indicator of chronicity (eg falls, cognitive impairment, social isolation, incontinence) was reported for 19.8% of respondents. One indicator only was reported for 64.0% of respondents, with 3 or more reported for 10%. The prevalence of all indicators of chronicity increased with age. Falls/poor mobility was reported for 7.5%, and 6.0% were reported to be cognitively impaired. There were 5.6% who were socially isolated and 2.3% incontinent. Amongst those who were dependent on carers and others, and particularly for those living in institutions, individual indicators were more often reported, especially falls/poor mobility (21.7% and 66.7%) and cognitive impairment (14.0% and 53.7%). Almost one third of the 54 patients living in institutions (30.8%) had been taking 7 or more medications routinely in the past 6 months.

GPs reported that there were health plans for a relatively small number of respondents, with around 1% having either DVA health care plan or another health care plan.

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