

SAND abstract No. 91 from the BEACH program 2005–06

Subject: Prevalence and management of gastrointestinal symptoms

Organisations supporting this study: AstraZeneca Pty Ltd and the Australian General Practice Statistics and Classification Centre (AGPSCC)

Issues: Prevalence/taking medication for: dyspepsia, heartburn, reflux/regurgitation, epigastric pain (multiple response allowed); frequency and severity of symptoms and impact on patients' quality of life (current/prior to medication) (multiple response allowed); underlying condition causing GI symptoms; management and level of symptom control.

Sample: 5,310 patient encounters from 181 GPs; data collection period: 20/9/2005 – 24/10/2005 and 29/11/2005 – 16/01/2006.

Method: Detailed in the paper entitled 'SAND Method 2005–06' on the website: www.fmrc.org.au/publications/SAND_abstracts.htm

Summary of results

The age-sex distribution of all patient encounters was the same as the distribution for all BEACH encounters in 2004–05, with the majority (59.0%) of patients being female.

Of the 5,310 patients, 1,444 (27.2%, 95% CI: 25.1–29.3) suffered from or took medication for at least one listed GI symptom. Prevalence did not differ between the sexes but the prevalence of one or more listed GI symptom increased significantly with age, from 3.0% among patients aged less than 15 years to 41.3% among patients aged 75 years and more ($p < .0001$).

Of the 1,442 patients with GI symptom(s), two-thirds (62.1%) had a single listed symptom; about a quarter (23.6%) experienced reflux/regurgitation, one-fifth (21.4%) heartburn, 9.9% dyspepsia, and 7.3% epigastric pain as their only GI symptom. There were 132 patients (9.2%) who had both heartburn and reflux.

One in five patients with reflux or epigastric pain reported daily frequency of symptoms, and 16.3% of patients reported the reflux or epigastric pain as severe. Approximately 16% of patients with either dyspepsia or heartburn experienced symptoms daily, and more than one in ten patients in each group reported their symptom as severe.

Of the 1,294 respondents on impact on their quality of life, 41.2% reported diet restrictions, 35.9% disrupted sleep, and 27.8% feeling unwell/worn out. About one-third (32.4%) reported that their GI symptoms did not impact on their life in any of the ways listed.

GPs specified the underlying cause of the symptoms for 1,358 patients: gastro-oesophageal reflux disease was specified for about half (51.0%) and the cause was not known for 21.4%.

Current management of GI symptoms was reported for 1,421 patients: 21.3% were receiving no treatment, proton pump inhibitors were used by 47.6% and antacids by 22.0%.

GPs estimated the level of symptom control with current management for 1,050 patients receiving treatment for their GI symptoms. GI symptoms were well controlled for 76.4% of these patients, partly controlled for 19.9%, and poorly controlled for the remainder (3.7%).

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