

12 Current status of *BEACH* and access to data

The *BEACH* program is now early in its fourth year. The database for the first three years includes data pertaining to approximately 300,000 GP-patient encounters from more than 3,000 GPs. This report provides one example of the use of the database for secondary analyses of a selected topic or for a specific research question. Each year the GPSCU publishes an annual report of *BEACH* results through the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare in which the results from the previous *BEACH* data year are reported on a national basis for the more common events.

However, the full database also allows investigation of less frequent events or study of selected populations or geographic locations. Those interested in encounters at which the patient is referred to an emergency department would find that while such referrals only occur at a rate of 1 per 1,000 encounters, there would be approximately 250 cases in the current database. This would be sufficient to provide an overview of the types of patients and the pattern of problems referred to an emergency department. The same concept applies to those morbidities that are relatively rare and to medications prescribed on an infrequent basis.

Others who are interested in the health of the population at a State or Territory level will find sufficient sample size already available for the more populated States to allow state based reporting. For example, there are approximately 100,000 encounter records available for New South Wales to date.

12.1 Public domain

In line with standard Australian Institute of Health and Welfare practice, an annual publication will provide a comprehensive view of general practice activity in Australia.

Abstracts of results for sub-studies conducted in the second year of the program and not reported in earlier documents are available through the web site of the Family Medicine Research Centre (of which the GPSCU is a part) at <http://www.fmrc.org.au>. These include: patient employment status and occupation; prevalence, severity and management of asthma; influenza and absenteeism; chronicity; length of consultation; co-morbidity not managed; point prevalence and management of depression; prevalence and management of cardiovascular disease; passive smoking; prevalence of anxiety-stress; education and employment status; self perceived stress levels among patients.

12.2 Participating organisations

Organisations providing funding for the *BEACH* program receive summary reports of the encounter data quarterly and standard reports about their subjects of interest. Analysis of the data is a complex task. The General Practice Statistics and Classification Unit has therefore designed standard report formats that cover most aspects of the subject under investigation. Individual data analyses are conducted where the specific research question is not adequately answered through standard reports.

12.3 External purchasers of standard reports

Non-contributing organisations may purchase standard reports or other ad hoc analyses. Charges are available on request. The General Practice Statistics and Classification Unit should be contacted for further information. Contact details are provided at the front of this publication.