

8 Overview of management

The BEACH survey form allowed GPs to record several aspects of patient management for each problem managed at each encounter. Pharmaceutical management is recorded in detail. Other modes of treatment, including clinical treatments (for example, counselling) and procedures, recorded briefly in the GP's own words, are also related to a single problem. Provision is made on the form for referrals and hospital admissions, and for pathology and imaging test orders, to be related to a single or multiple problems (see Appendix 1).

A summary of management at general practice encounters from 1999–00 to 2008–09 are reported for each year in the 10-year report *General practice activity in Australia 1999–00 to 2008–09: 10 year data tables*.¹

At the 96,688 recorded encounters, GPs undertook 219,525 management activities in total. The most common management form was medication, either prescribed, GP-supplied, or advised for over-the-counter purchase. 'Other treatments' were the second most common management activity, with clinical treatments occurring more frequently than procedural treatments (Table 8.1).

For an 'average' 100 GP–patient encounters, GPs provided 86 prescriptions, and 34 clinical treatments, undertook 17 procedures, made 9 referrals to specialists and 4 to allied health services, and placed 46 pathology test orders and 10 imaging test orders.

Table 8.1: Summary of management

Management type	Number	Rate per 100 encounters (n = 96,688)	95% LCL	95% UCL	Rate per 100 problems (n = 149,462)	95% LCL	95% UCL
Medications	102,737	106.3	104.0	108.5	68.7	67.5	70.0
Prescribed	83,509	86.4	84.1	88.6	55.9	54.5	57.2
GP-supplied	10,670	11.0	10.2	11.8	7.1	6.6	7.6
Advised OTC	8,557	8.9	8.3	9.4	5.7	5.3	6.1
Other treatments	49,048	50.7	48.5	52.9	32.8	31.5	34.1
Clinical*	32,867	34.0	32.1	35.9	22.0	20.8	23.2
Procedural*	16,181	16.7	16.0	17.5	10.8	10.4	11.3
Referrals	13,251	13.7	13.2	14.2	8.9	8.6	9.2
Specialist*	8,699	9.0	8.7	9.3	5.8	5.6	6.0
Allied health services*	3,745	3.9	3.6	4.1	2.5	2.3	2.7
Hospital*	317	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.2
Emergency department*	199	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.2
Other medical services*	48	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other referrals*	243	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.2
Pathology	44,066	45.6	43.8	47.4	29.5	28.4	30.5
Imaging	9,469	9.8	9.4	10.2	6.3	6.1	6.6
Other investigations ^(a)	954	1.0	0.9	1.1	0.6	0.6	0.7
Total management activities	219,525	227.1	—	—	146.8	—	—

(a) Other investigations reported here include only those ordered by the GP. Other investigations in Chapter 12 include those ordered by the GP and those done at the surgery.

Note: LCL—lower confidence limit; UCL—upper confidence limit; OTC—over-the-counter.

Another perspective emerges in analysis of the number of encounters or problems for which at least one form of management was recorded by the GP (Table 8.2). At least one management action was recorded at 92.2% of encounters and for 86.3% of problems managed.

- At least one medication or other treatment was given for nearly three-quarters of the problems managed.
- At least one medication (most commonly prescribed) was prescribed, supplied or advised for more than half the problems managed.
- At least one other treatment (most commonly clinical) was provided for nearly one-third of problems managed.
- At least one referral (most commonly to a specialist) was made for 9% of problems managed.
- At least one investigation (most commonly pathology) was requested for 18.5% of problems managed (Table 8.2).

Table 8.2: Encounters and problems for which management was recorded

Management type	Number of encounters	Per cent of total encounters ^(a) (n = 96,688)	Number of problems	Per cent of total problems ^(a) (n = 149,462)
At least one management type	89,155	92.2	128,967	86.3
At least one medication or other treatment	79,686	82.4	108,961	72.9
At least one medication	62,929	65.1	81,204	54.3
At least one prescription	52,774	54.6	67,061	44.9
At least one GP-supplied	7,714	8.0	7,908	5.3
At least one OTC advised	8,233	8.5	8,568	5.7
At least one other treatment	38,307	39.6	43,824	29.3
At least one clinical treatment	26,405	27.3	29,840	20.0
At least one procedural treatment	14,536	15.0	15,118	10.1
At least one referral	12,334	12.8	13,228	8.9
At least one referral to a specialist	8,320	8.6	8,795	5.9
At least one referral to allied health	3,585	3.7	3,762	2.5
At least one referral to hospital	317	0.3	331	0.2
At least one referral to emergency department	199	0.2	209	0.1
At least one referral to other medical services	243	0.3	253	0.2
At least one referral NOS	48	0.0	51	0.0
At least one investigation	23,794	24.6	27,640	18.5
At least one pathology order	17,584	18.2	20,310	13.6
At least one imaging order	8,171	8.5	8,464	5.7
At least one other investigation ^(b)	902	0.9	617	0.6

(a) Figures will not total 100, as multiple events may occur in one encounter or in the management of one problem at encounter.

(b) Other investigations reported here only include those ordered by the GP. Other investigations in Chapter 12 include those ordered by the GP and those done at the surgery.

Note: OTC—over-the-counter; NOS—not otherwise specified.

The combinations of management types related to each problem were then investigated. The majority of treatments occurred either as a single component or in combination with one other component. Management was provided:

- as a single component for almost two-thirds of the problems managed
- as a double component for 19% of problems managed
- rarely with more than two components (results not tabled).

Table 8.3 lists the most common management combinations. Medication alone was the most common management, followed by a clinical treatment alone, and the combination of a medication and a clinical treatment. When a problem was referred to another health professional it was most likely that no other treatments were given for the problem at the encounter. This situation also applied to pathology testing.

Table 8.3: Most common management combinations

1+ medication	1+ clinical treatment	1+ procedural treatment	1+ referral	1+ imaging order	1+ pathology order	Per cent of total problems (n = 149,462)	Per cent of total encounters (n = 96,688)
No recorded management						9.4	7.8
1+ management recorded						90.6	92.2
✓						37.4	31.4
	✓					9.4	6.9
✓	✓					6.1	10.2
					✓	5.1	2.9
			✓			4.4	3.4
		✓				4.3	3.7
✓					✓	3.2	4.7
✓		✓				2.6	4.3
				✓		2.7	1.7
✓			✓			1.4	3.0
		✓			✓	1.3	1.3
	✓				✓	1.2	1.3
✓				✓		1.0	1.9
	✓		✓			0.9	1.2
✓	✓				✓	0.5	1.7
				✓	✓	0.5	0.6
✓	✓		✓			0.4	1.1
✓		✓			✓	0.3	1.1
	✓	✓				0.3	0.6
	✓			✓		0.3	0.4
			✓		✓	0.3	0.5

Note: 1+—at least one specified management type.

8.1 Changes in management over the decade 1999–00 to 2008–09

Changes over the decade 1999–00 to 2008–09 are described in detail in the accompanying report *General practice activity in Australia 1999–00 to 2008–09: 10 year data tables*.¹

Briefly, the major changes noted were:

- a significant decrease in the rate at which medications were prescribed
- significant increases in rates of:
 - procedural treatments undertaken
 - referrals made
 - pathology tests ordered
 - imaging tests ordered.