

10 Other treatments

The BEACH survey form allows GPs to record up to two other treatments for each problem managed at the encounter. Other treatments include all clinical and procedural treatments provided. These groups are defined in Appendix 4. Routine clinical measurements or observations, such as measurements of blood pressure and physical examinations, were not included if undertaken by the GP, but were included if undertaken by the practice nurse.

The GPs were also asked to indicate whether the treatment was done by a practice nurse (tick box). In this chapter all 'other treatments' are reported, irrespective of whether they were done by the GP or by the practice nurse. That is, the non-pharmacological management provided in general practice patient encounters is described, rather than management provided specifically by the GP. Treatments provided by the practice nurse are reported separately in Chapter 13.

Data on other treatments are reported for each year from 1999–00 to 2008–09 in the 10-year summary report *General practice activity in Australia 1999–00 to 2008–09: 10 year data tables*.¹

10.1 Number of other treatments

Other treatments were commonly provided in the management of patient morbidity. In 2008–09, a total of 49,048 other treatments were recorded, at a rate of 50.7 per 100 encounters. Two-thirds of these were clinical treatments (Table 10.1).

Table 10.1: Summary of other treatments

Variable	Number	Rate per 100 encs (n = 96,688)	95% LCL	95% UCL	Rate per 100 problems (n = 149,462)	95% LCL	95% UCL
Other treatments	49,048	50.7	48.5	52.9	32.8	31.5	34.1
Clinical treatments	32,867	34.0	32.1	35.9	22.0	20.8	23.2
Procedural treatments	16,181	16.7	16	17.5	10.8	10.4	11.3
At least one other treatment	38,307	39.6	38.3	41.0	—	—	—

Note: Encs—encounters; LCL—lower confidence limit; UCL—upper confidence limit.

Table 10.2 shows the relationship between other treatments and pharmacological treatments given to patients.

- In nearly two-thirds (63.3%) of the problems that were managed with an 'other treatment', no concurrent pharmacological treatment was provided.
- A clinical treatment was provided in the management of 20% of problems. For nearly two-thirds of these problems, no medication was provided.
- A procedure was undertaken in the management of 10% of problems, with no pharmacological management given for two-thirds of these problems.

Table 10.2: Relationship between other treatments and pharmacological treatments

Co-management of problems with other treatments	Number of problems	Per cent within class	Per cent of problems (<i>n</i> = 149,462)	95% LCL	95% UCL
At least one other treatment	43,824	100.0	29.3	28.2	30.4
Without pharmacological treatment	27,757	63.3	18.6	17.9	19.3
At least one clinical treatment	29,840	100.0	20.0	18.9	21.0
Without pharmacological treatment	18,577	62.3	12.4	11.8	13.1
At least one procedural treatment	15,118	100.0	10.1	9.7	10.5
Without pharmacological treatment	9,833	65.0	6.6	6.3	6.9

Note: LCL—lower confidence limit; UCL—upper confidence limit.

10.2 Clinical treatments

Clinical treatments include general and specific advice, counselling or education, family planning, and administrative processes. During 2008–09, there were 32,867 clinical treatments recorded, at a rate of 34.0 per 100 encounters, or 22.0 per 100 problems managed (Table 10.1).

Most frequent clinical treatments

Table 10.3 lists the most common clinical treatments provided. Each treatment is expressed as a percentage of all other treatments, and as a rate per 100 encounters with 95% confidence limits.

General advice and education was the most frequently recorded clinical treatment, at a rate of 6.1 per 100 encounters. The most common preventive activity was counselling about nutrition and weight (4.1 per 100 encounters). There were a number of other groups that also could be considered preventive in nature, including counselling/advice for exercise, smoking, prevention and alcohol. Together, the abovementioned preventive treatments accounted for 20.5% of all clinical treatments, provided at a rate of 7.1 per 100 encounters. Advice and education about treatment was provided at a rate of 3.5 per 100 encounters. Psychological counselling was provided at a rate of 3.2 per 100 encounters, and advice and education about medication was given at a rate of 2.3 per 100 encounters (Table 10.3).

Table 10.3: Most frequent clinical treatments

Clinical treatment	Number	Per cent of other treatments (n = 49,048)	Rate per 100 encounters (n = 96,688)	95% LCL	95% UCL
Advice/education*	5,928	12.1	6.1	5.4	6.9
Counselling/advice—nutrition/weight*	3,921	8.0	4.1	3.6	4.5
Counselling—problem*	3,706	7.6	3.8	3.3	4.4
Advice/education—treatment*	3,427	7.0	3.5	3.1	4.0
Counselling—psychological*	3,130	6.4	3.2	3.0	3.5
Advice/education—medication*	2,243	4.6	2.3	2.1	2.6
Sickness certificate*	1,880	3.8	1.9	1.6	2.2
Other admin/document*	1,759	3.6	1.8	1.7	2.0
Reassurance, support	1,465	3.0	1.5	1.3	1.8
Counselling/advice—exercise*	1,346	2.7	1.4	1.2	1.6
Counselling/advice—smoking*	721	1.5	0.8	0.7	0.8
Observe/wait*	410	0.8	0.4	0.3	0.6
Counselling/advice—health/body*	393	0.8	0.4	0.3	0.5
Counselling/advice—alcohol*	374	0.8	0.4	0.3	0.4
Counselling/advice—prevention*	367	0.8	0.4	0.3	0.5
Family planning*	328	0.7	0.3	0.3	0.4
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>31,399</i>	<i>64.0</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>—</i>
Total clinical treatments	32,867	67.0	34.0	32.1	35.9

* Includes multiple ICPC-2 or ICPC-2 PLUS codes (see Appendix 4, <www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/subject/19>).

Note: Includes the most common clinical treatments, those accounting for > 0.5% of all other treatments. LCL—lower confidence limit; UCL—upper confidence limit; admin—administrative.

Problems managed with clinical treatments

Table 10.4 lists the top 10 problems managed with a clinical treatment. It also shows the extent to which clinical treatments were used for that problem and the relationship between the use of a clinical treatment and a medication for individual problems.

- Clinical treatments were provided in the management of 29,840 problems (20.0% of all problems).
- Depression was the most frequently managed problem with a clinical treatment at a rate of 1.8 per 100 encounters. Upper respiratory tract infections were managed with clinical treatments at a rate of 1.7 per 100 encounters.
- Half the contacts with depression involving management with a clinical treatment did not result in a medication being prescribed/advised/supplied.
- Twenty-eight per cent of upper respiratory tract infection contacts involved a clinical treatment, with 56.8% of these being managed without medication.
- More than one in ten (10.9%) hypertension contacts resulted in a clinical treatment, with nearly half (48.2%) of these being managed without medication.
- A clinical treatment was used at one-quarter (25.1%) of contacts with lipid disorders, and 70.9% of these did not involve medication.

Table 10.4: The 10 most common problems managed with a clinical treatment

Problem managed	Number	Per cent of problems with clinical treatment	Rate per 100 encounters ^(a) (<i>n</i> = 96,688)	95% LCL	95% UCL	Per cent of this problem ^(b)	Per cent of treated problems no meds ^(c)
Depression*	1,781	6.0	1.8	1.7	2.0	43.3	51.4
Upper respiratory tract infection	1,666	5.6	1.7	1.5	1.9	28.2	56.8
Hypertension*	1,067	3.6	1.1	1.0	1.2	10.9	48.2
Diabetes—all*	1,024	3.4	1.1	0.9	1.2	25.9	59.5
Lipid disorders*	951	3.2	1.0	0.9	1.1	25.1	70.9
Anxiety*	829	2.8	0.9	0.8	1.0	44.4	62.2
Gastroenteritis*	638	2.1	0.7	0.6	0.7	47.1	59.6
Back complaint*	547	1.8	0.6	0.5	0.6	20.7	50.1
Viral disease, other/NOS	508	1.7	0.5	0.4	0.6	44.5	61.8
Test results*	474	1.6	0.5	0.4	0.6	32.1	95.1
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>9,485</i>	<i>31.8</i>	—	—	—	—	—
Total problems with clinical treatments	29,840	100.0	30.9	29.2	32.5	—	—

(a) Rate of provision of clinical treatment for selected problem per 100 total encounters.

(b) Percentage of contacts with this problem that generated at least one clinical treatment.

(c) The numerator is the number of cases of this problem that generated at least one clinical treatment but generated no medications. The denominator is the total number of contacts for this problem that generated at least one clinical treatment (with or without medications).

* Includes multiple ICPC-2 or ICPC-2 PLUS codes (see Appendix 4, <www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/subject/19>).

Note: LCL—lower confidence limit; UCL—upper confidence limit; meds—medications; NOS—not otherwise specified.

10.3 Procedural treatments

Procedural treatments included therapeutic actions and diagnostic procedures undertaken at the encounter. Injections for immunisations/vaccinations are not counted here as procedures, as these have already been reported as medications (see Chapter 9). There were 16,181 procedural treatments provided in these general practice encounters during 2008–09 at a rate of 16.7 per 100 encounters (Table 10.1).

Most frequent procedures

Table 10.5 lists the most common procedural treatments provided by GPs. Each treatment is expressed as a percentage of all other treatments, and as a rate per 100 encounters with 95% confidence limits. These results only report investigations actually undertaken at the encounter. They do not include investigations that were ordered by the GP from an external provider. A summary of all investigations (both undertaken and ordered) is provided in Table 12.6.

The most frequently recorded group of procedures in 2008–09 were excisions, at a rate of 3.2 per 100 encounters, and accounting for 6.3% of all other treatments. Other procedural treatments that were frequently recorded included dressings and local injections (each at a rate of 2.3 per 100 encounters) and incisions (1.3 per 100 encounters) (Table 10.5).

Table 10.5: Most frequent procedural treatments

Procedural treatment	Number	Per cent of other treatments (n = 49,048)	Rate per 100 encounters (n = 96,688)	95% LCL	95% UCL
Excision/removal tissue/biopsy/destruction/debridement/cauterisation*	3,093	6.3	3.2	2.9	3.5
Dressing/pressure/compression/tamponade*	2,196	4.5	2.3	2.1	2.4
Local injection/infiltration*	2,181	4.5	2.3	2.1	2.4
Incision/drainage/flushing/aspiration/removal body fluid*	1,242	2.5	1.3	1.2	1.4
Physical medicine/rehabilitation*	1,171	2.4	1.2	1.1	1.3
Pap smear*	1,137	2.3	1.2	1.0	1.3
Other therapeutic procedures/surgery NEC*	899	1.8	0.9	0.7	1.1
Repair/fixation—suture/cast/prosthetic device (apply/remove)*	765	1.6	0.8	0.7	0.9
Other preventive procedures/high risk medication*	589	1.2	0.6	0.5	0.7
INR test	504	1.0	0.5	0.4	0.6
Physical function test*	466	1.0	0.5	0.4	0.6
Electrical tracings*	464	1.0	0.5	0.4	0.5
Check-up—practice nurse*	381	0.8	0.4	0.2	0.5
Urine test*	273	0.6	0.3	0.2	0.3
<i>Subtotal</i>	15,359	31.3	—	—	—
Total procedural treatments	16,181	33.0	16.7	16.0	17.5

(a) Excludes all local injection/infiltrations performed for immunisations.

* Includes multiple ICPC-2 or ICPC-2 PLUS codes (see Appendix 4, <www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/subject/19>).

Note: Includes the most common procedural treatments, those accounting for > 0.5% of all other treatments. LCL—lower confidence limit; UCL—upper confidence limit; NEC—not elsewhere classified; INR—international normalised ratio.

Problems managed with a procedural treatment

Table 10.6 lists the top 10 problems managed with a procedural treatment. It also demonstrates the proportion of contacts with each problem that was managed with a procedure, and the proportion of problems managed with a procedure without medication given concurrently.

- A total of 15,118 problems involved a procedural treatment in their management (10.1% of all problems).
- The top 10 problems accounted for 36.5% of all problems for which a procedure was used.
- Female genital check-ups were the most common problem managed with a procedure, with a procedure undertaken at over half (53.0%) of all contacts.
- Nearly three-quarters (73.1%) of contacts for excessive ear wax were managed with a procedure, with the vast majority of these (91.6%) not given medication for this problem at the encounter.

Table 10.6: The 10 most common problems managed with a procedural treatment

Problem managed	Number	Per cent of problems with procedure	Rate per 100 encs ^(a) (<i>n</i> = 96,688)	95% LCL	95% UCL	Per cent of this problem ^(b)	Per cent of treated problems no meds ^(c)
Female genital check-up*	1,036	6.9	1.1	0.9	1.2	53.0	97.2
Solar keratosis/sunburn	828	5.5	0.9	0.8	1.0	69.2	97.7
Laceration/cut	701	4.6	0.7	0.6	0.8	79.3	79.6
Excessive ear wax	591	3.9	0.6	0.6	0.7	73.1	91.6
Malignant neoplasm of skin	536	3.5	0.6	0.5	0.7	45.5	95.8
Chronic ulcer skin (including varicose ulcer)	483	3.2	0.5	0.4	0.6	77.1	78.7
Warts	448	3.0	0.5	0.4	0.5	75.1	95.1
Back complaint*	301	2.0	0.3	0.2	0.4	11.4	54.2
General check-up*	302	2.0	0.3	0.3	0.4	12.7	76.0
Skin disease, other	294	1.9	0.3	0.3	0.4	35.3	92.0
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>5,520</i>	<i>36.5</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>—</i>
Total problems with procedural treatments	15,118	100.0	15.6	15.0	16.3	—	—

(a) Rate of provision of procedural treatment for selected problem per 100 total encounters.

(b) Percentage of contacts with this problem that generated at least one procedural treatment.

(c) The numerator is the number of cases of this problem that generated at least one procedural treatment but generated no medications. The denominator is the total number of contacts (for this problem) that generated at least one procedural treatment (with or without medications).

* Includes multiple ICPC-2 or ICPC-2 PLUS codes (see Appendix 4, <www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/subject/19>).

Note: Encs—encounters; LCL—lower confidence limit; UCL—upper confidence limit; meds—medications.

10.4 Changes in other treatments over the decade 1999–00 to 2008–09

An overview of changes in other treatments provided in general practice over the decade can be found in the companion report *General practice activity in Australia 1999–00 to 2008–09: 10 year data tables*.¹

In summary, there was no change in the rate of clinical treatments provided overall between 1999–00 and 2008–09. There were significant increases in the rates of general advice and education, psychological counselling and sickness certificates. There was a significant decrease in the rate at which advice/education about treatment and medication was given.

There were significantly more procedures performed at general practice encounters in 2008–09 than in 1999–00. In particular, there were significantly more local injections and Pap smears recorded.