

# 3 The *BEACH* database 1999–00

## 3.1 The GP sample

This study is based on data collected between 1 April 1999 and 31 March 2000. The final participating sample consisted of 1,047 practitioners who provided details pertaining to 104,700 encounters. These GPs represented 39.1% of those who were contacted and available, and 35.2% of those with whom contact was attempted. The following summary of the database is provided as a baseline for later comparison of specific groups of GPs or patients.

A comparison of characteristics of participating GPs (39.1% of those with whom contact was established) with those of the GPs from the random sample who declined to participate found no significant differences between the groups, with the exception of age group. Participants were significantly older and GPs aged less than 35 years were under-represented. The encounter data were weighted by GP age and sex to overcome the difference and ensure that the *BEACH* dataset was representative of Australian general practice. The weighting also incorporated the differential activity level of each GP to improve the national estimates.

## 3.2 GP characteristics

Of the 1,047 participants, 69.6% were male and 59.2% were 45 years of age or older. Three-quarters of the participants (75.4%) had been in general practice for more than 10 years and 15.3% could be regarded as practising part time, working fewer than six sessions per week. Almost one-fifth of participants were in solo practice (18.1%) and the majority (73.3%) had graduated in Australia. One in 10 respondents (10.6%) conducted more than half of his or her consultations in a language other than English (Table 3.1).

## 3.3 The patients

Approximately one in seven encounters were with children aged less than 15 years (14.8%), one in 10 were with young adults (10.4%), and approximately one in four with patients in each of the following age groups, 25–44 years (26.3%), 45–64 years (24.5%), and 65 years and older (24.1%).

The patient was new to the practice at 7.3% of encounters and patients who held a health care card accounted for 38.6% of all encounters. At 8.0% of encounters the patient was from a non-English-speaking background, and at 0.7% the patient indicated he or she was an Aboriginal person and/or a Torres Strait Islander (Table 3.2).

**Table 3.1: Characteristics of participating GPs**

GP characteristic	Number <sup>(a)</sup>	Per cent of GPs <sup>(a)</sup> (n=1,047)
Male	729	69.6
Age (missing=4)		
<35 years	88	8.4
35–44 years	338	32.4
45–54 years	338	32.4
55+ years	279	26.7
Years in general practice (missing=8)		
<5 years	90	8.7
6–10 years	166	15.9
11–19 years	331	31.9
20+ years	452	43.5
Sessions per week (missing=6)		
<6 per week	159	15.3
6–10 per week	691	66.0
>10 per week	191	18.3
Size of practice (missing=19) <sup>*(b)</sup>		
Solo	189	18.2
2–4 GPs	373	36.3
5–10 GPs	400	38.9
11+ GPs	68	6.6
Graduated in Australia (missing=2)	767	73.3
More than 50% of consultations in languages other than English	105	10.6

(a) Missing data removed.

Note: There was an error in Table 3.2 on page 12, *General Practice Activity in Australia 1999–2000* (Britt et al. 2000). The distribution reported here is correct.

## 3.4 The encounters

The distribution of encounter types shows the varied nature of general practice (Table 3.3). Direct consultations (where the patient was seen by the GP) represented 96.7% of all encounters. By far the majority of these were claimable on Medicare. Standard surgery consultations were most common, accounting for 78.1% of all recorded patient contacts. Workers' compensation claims represented 2.0% of all recorded encounters. Indirect consultations (patient not seen) represented 3.3 % of encounters.

**Table 3.2: Characteristics of the patients at encounters**

Patient variable	Number	Per cent of encounters (n=104,856)	95% LCL	95% UCL
Sex ( <i>Missing</i> )	(1,182)	..	..	..
Males	44,308	42.7	42.0	43.5
Female	59,366	57.3	56.5	58.0
Age group ( <i>Missing</i> )	(804)	..	..	..
<1 year	2,447	2.4	2.2	2.5
1–4 years	5,384	5.2	4.9	5.5
5–14 years	7,471	7.2	6.9	7.5
15–24 years	10,814	10.4	9.9	10.8
25–44 years	27,326	26.3	25.5	27.0
45–64 years	25,521	24.5	24.0	25.0
65–74 years	12,486	12.0	11.5	12.5
75+ years	12,603	12.1	11.4	12.9
New patient to practice	7,641	7.3	6.6	8.0
Health care card holder	40,452	38.6	37.0	40.2
Non-English-speaking background	8,356	8.0	4.8	11.1
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	745	0.7	0.0	1.5

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

**Table 3.3: Type of encounter**

Variable	Number	Rate per 100 encounters <sup>(a)</sup>	95% LCL	95% UCL
General practitioners	1,048	..	..	..
Direct consultations	97,436	96.7	96.3	97.0
No charge	1,345	1.3	0.9	1.7
Medicare-claimable	93,698	93.0	92.4	93.5
Standard surgery consultations	78,761	78.1	77.1	79.1
Workers' compensation claimable	2,005	2.0	1.7	2.3
Other paid (hospital, State, etc.)	1,236	1.2	0.0	2.8
Indirect consultations	3,367	3.3	2.8	3.8
<b>Total encounters</b>	<b>104,856</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>..</b>

(a) Missing data for 4,054 encounters removed. Percentage base (n) = 100,802.

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

### 3.5 The content of the encounters

Using weighted data, there were 104,856 encounters from 1,048 GPs. An average of 149 patient reasons for encounter were described per 100 encounters. Of the 147 problems managed per 100 encounters, 45.3% were considered new problems to the patient. Problems regarded by the GP as likely to be work-related (irrespective of whether the encounter was covered by workers' compensation) occurred at a rate of 3.2 per 100 encounters.

Medications were prescribed, advised or supplied at a rate of 110.1 per 100 encounters. Non-pharmacological treatments were recorded less often than medications, with clinical non-procedural treatments (e.g. counselling, advice or psychotherapy) being recorded at a higher rate (33.5 per 100 encounters) than procedural treatments such as excisions and physical therapies (12.5 per 100 encounters). Approximately 11 referrals were made per 100 encounters. Orders for a pathology test (or batch of tests, e.g. FBC, HIV) were recorded more frequently (26.3 per 100 encounters) than were referrals. Orders for imaging (e.g. x-rays, scans) occurred at a rate of 7.5 per 100 encounters (Table 3.4).

**Table 3.4: The content of the encounters**

Variable	Number	Rate per 100 encounters	95% LCL	95% UCL	Rate per 100 problems	95% LCL	95% UCL
General practitioners	1,048	..	..	..	..	..	..
Encounters	104,856	..	..	..	..	..	..
Reasons for encounter	155,690	148.5	146.7	150.2	..	..	..
Problems managed	153,857	146.7	144.9	148.6	..	..	..
New problems	47,458	45.3	43.6	46.9	30.9	29.7	32.0
Old problems	106,399	101.5	99.0	103.9	69.2	68.0	70.3
Work-related	3,350	3.2	2.9	3.5	2.2	2.0	2.4
Medications	115,432	110.1	107.8	112.4	75.0	73.6	76.4
Clinical treatments	35,102	33.5	31.8	35.2	22.8	21.7	23.9
Procedural treatments	13,092	12.5	11.9	13.0	8.5	8.1	8.9
Referrals	11,760	11.2	10.8	11.7	7.6	7.4	7.9
Pathology tests ordered	27,613	26.3	25.2	27.5	18.0	17.2	18.7
Imaging test ordered	7,919	7.5	7.1	7.8	5.1	4.9	5.3

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