

4 The encounters

There were 1,048 GPs who participated in BEACH in 1999–00, one of whom saw no male patients. These GPs provided information about 104,856 patient encounters. At 1,182 of these encounters patient sex was not recorded. There were 44,308 encounters with male patients and 59,366 encounters with female patients⁴⁹.

4.1 Distribution of services by patient sex

The proportion of encounters claimable through Medicare were significantly lower for male patients (92.1%) than for female patients (93.7%). In contrast, encounters claimable through workers compensation were relatively more frequent among males (3.0%) than females (1.2%).

Of the Medicare-claimable encounters, males had a significantly greater proportion of standard consultations (79.6%) and a significantly lower proportion of long consultations (7.0%) than females (77.1% and 8.9% respectively).

There were no other significant differences between the sexes in proportions of direct consultations, consultations with no charge, consultations paid by other sources (e.g. hospital, the States etc.) or indirect consultations (Table 4.1).

4.2 Summary of morbidity and management by patient sex

Although there were no differences between encounters with male and female patients in the number of recorded RFEs, the number of problems managed at consultation did differ. Encounters with males involved the management of significantly fewer problems (143.9 per 100 encounters) than did encounters with females (149.0).

This difference was not reflected in the more specific comparison of rates of new problems, or of rates of follow-up consultations for old problems. However, there was a significant difference in the relative rate of problems thought by the GP to be related to work. Encounters with males involved significantly more work-related problems (4.8 per 100 encounters) than those with females (2.0). This trend was maintained when analysed in terms of the proportion of total problems managed. A significantly greater proportion of total problems were work-related for male patients (3.3 per 100 problems) than for female patients (1.3).

At encounters with male and female patients there were no significant differences in overall rates of medication, referral or imaging. However, referrals were made significantly more often for male patients when measured in terms of problems managed. Male patients were referred at a rate of 8.1 per 100 problems managed compared with 7.3 per 100 problems for female patients. This difference, although significant, was small and was not echoed in any of the more specific referral categories.

Procedural treatments were provided significantly more often at encounters with males (13.5 per 100 encounters) than at those with females (11.8), even though there was no significant difference between the sexes for the overall category of other treatments. This

trend was maintained when analysed in terms of problems managed, with male patients having significantly more procedural treatments performed (9.4 per 100 problems) than female patients (7.9).

In contrast, orders for pathology tests were significantly less frequent at encounters with males (23.1 per 100 encounters) than at those with females (28.7). When analysed in terms of problems managed, male patients were again significantly less likely to have pathology tests ordered (16.1 per 100 problems) compared with female patients (19.3) (Table 4.2).

Due to the lack of substantial differences found in describing the morbidity management in terms of rates per 100 problems rather than per 100 encounters, the remaining results in this report are presented in terms of rates per 100 encounters.

Table 4.1: Distribution of services by patient sex

Variable	Male (n = 44,308)			Female (n = 59,366)		
	Rate per 100 encounters ^(a)	95% LCL	95% UCL	Rate per 100 encounters ^(a)	95% LCL	95% UCL
Direct consultations	97.0	96.7	97.4	96.4	96.0	96.8
No charge	0.7	0.2	1.1	0.5	0.1	0.9
Medicare-claimable	92.1	91.4	92.7	93.7	93.1	94.2
Short surgery consultations	1.4	0.2	2.6	1.3	0.3	2.3
Standard surgery consultations	79.6	78.6	80.7	77.1	76.1	78.2
Long surgery consultations	7.0	6.2	7.7	8.9	8.1	9.7
Prolonged surgery consultations	0.4	0.0	1.3	0.6	0.0	1.4
Home visits	1.1	0.4	1.9	1.6	0.8	2.4
Hospital	0.5	0.0	3.2	0.4	0.0	2.8
Nursing home	0.6	0.0	1.7	1.2	0.0	2.6
Other items	1.6	0.8	2.3	2.5	1.6	3.4
Workers compensation	3.0	2.4	3.5	1.2	0.8	1.7
Other paid (hospital, State, etc.)	1.4	0.0	4.1	1.1	0.0	3.3
Indirect consultations	3.0	2.3	3.6	3.6	2.9	4.2
Prescription	1.6	1.0	2.1	1.9	1.4	2.4
Referral	0.5	0.0	1.1	0.5	0.0	1.0
Certificate	0.1	0.0	0.9	0.1	0.0	0.7
Other	1.0	0.2	1.6	1.2	0.6	1.8
Missing	(1,721)	..	..	(2,163)	..	..

(a) Missing data removed.

Note: Shading indicates statistically significant differences. LCL—lower confidence limit; UCL—upper confidence limit.

Table 4.2: Summary of morbidity and management by patient sex

Variable	Male (n = 44,308)					Female (n = 59,366)				
	Number	Rate per 100 encs	95% LCL	95% UCL	Rate per 100 probs	95% LCL	95% UCL	Rate per 100 encs	95% LCL	95% UCL
General practitioners	1,047	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Encounters (n)	44,308	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Reasons for encounter	64,932	164.6	144.7	148.4	..	..	151.8	150.0	148.2	151.8
Problems managed	63,740	143.9	141.9	145.8	..	..	150.9	149.0	147.0	150.9
New problems	20,045	45.2	43.5	47.0	31.5	30.2	32.7	45.4	43.8	47.1
Old problems	43,695	98.6	96.0	101.2	68.6	67.3	69.8	103.5	100.9	106.1
Work-related	2,116	4.8	4.3	5.3	3.3	2.9	3.7	2.0	1.6	2.4
Medications	48,851	110.3	107.6	112.9	76.6	75.0	78.2	110.2	107.8	112.6
Prescribed	41,507	93.7	90.9	96.5	65.1	63.4	66.8	94.1	91.7	96.5
Advised OTC	4,143	9.4	8.3	10.4	6.5	5.7	7.3	9.5	8.7	10.3
GP-supplied	3,202	7.2	5.9	8.6	5.0	4.1	6.0	6.6	5.4	7.8
Other treatments	20,508	46.3	44.2	48.4	32.2	30.8	33.5	45.9	43.9	47.8
Clinical	14,542	32.8	31.2	34.4	22.8	21.6	24.0	34.1	32.6	35.7
Procedural	5,966	13.5	12.8	14.1	9.4	8.9	9.9	11.8	11.2	12.3
Referrals	5,171	11.7	11.1	12.2	8.1	7.8	8.5	10.8	10.4	11.3
Emergency department	44	0.1	0.0	1.5	0.1	0.0	1.0	0.1	0.0	0.7
Hospital admissions	350	0.8	0.4	1.2	0.6	0.3	0.8	0.7	0.3	1.0
Specialist	3,314	7.5	7.1	7.9	5.2	4.9	5.5	7.1	6.8	7.5
Allied health services	1,463	3.3	3.0	3.7	2.3	2.1	2.5	3.0	2.7	3.3
Pathology	10,238	23.1	21.7	24.6	16.1	15.1	17.0	28.7	27.4	30.1
Imaging	3,155	7.1	6.7	7.6	5.0	4.6	5.3	7.9	7.5	8.3

Note: Shading indicates statistically significant differences. Encs—encounters; LCL—lower confidence limit; UCL—upper confidence limit; Probs—problems; OTC—over-the-counter medication.