

4 The participating GPs

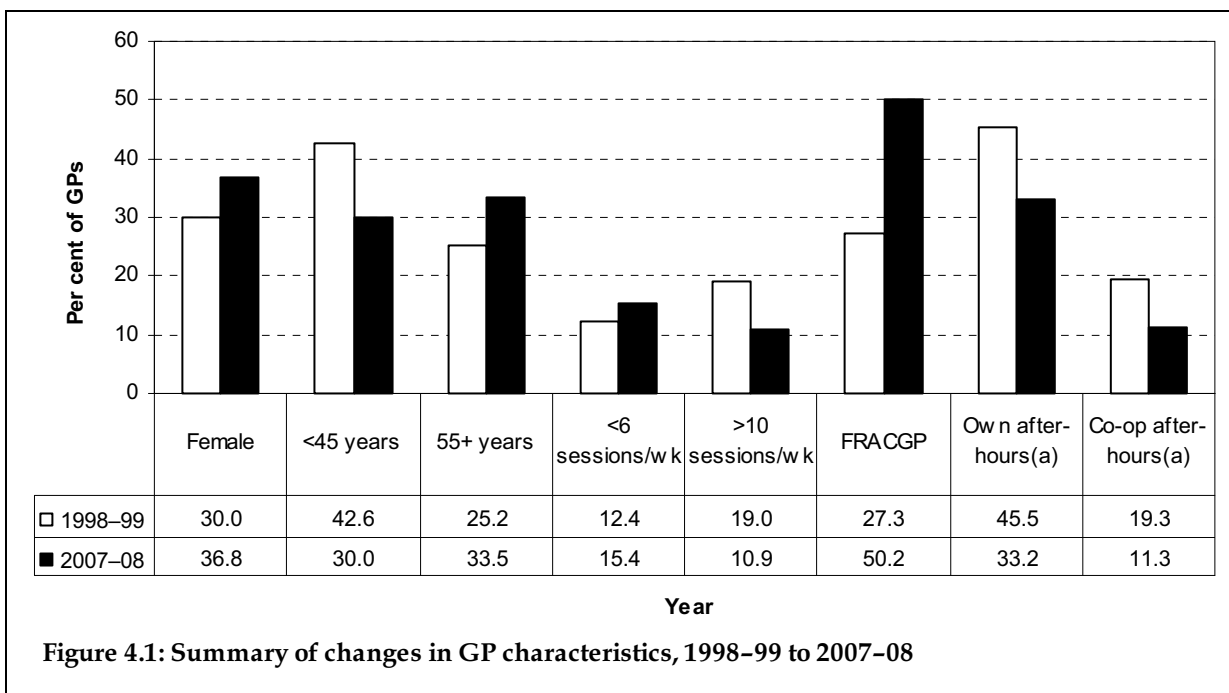
Part of the BEACH method involves the completion of a GP profile questionnaire by each GP participant (see Appendix 4). This questionnaire provides information about the GP and the major practice at which they are employed. Over the 10 years, the questions have occasionally been altered to improve the quality and clarity of the data collected, or to investigate topics not previously surveyed as they become relevant. Therefore, some characteristics have data over the full 10-year period, and some for shorter periods.

Since BEACH began in 1998–99 some trends have emerged in the characteristics of GP participants (Table 4.1). The most noticeable changes over the 10 years of the study are listed below and some are presented in Figure 4.1.

- The feminisation of the general practice workforce is reflected in the growing proportion of GP participants who are female. The proportion of female participants increased from 30.0% in 1998–99 to 36.8% in 2007–08, and reflects the change in the sample frame of all recognised GPs claiming more than 375 A1 items in the previous quarter in Australia, as provided each year by DoHA from Medicare claims data. In 1998–99, the proportion of female GPs in the sample frame was 29.2% (Table 4.1 in *General practice activity in Australia 1998–99*)¹⁷, and in 2007–08, 35.9% (Table 3.2 in *General practice activity in Australia 2007–08*).⁷
- There has been a considerable decrease in the proportion of GPs aged 35–44 years (from 36.3% in 1998–99 to 22.2% in 2007–08), and an increase in the proportion aged 55 years and over (from 25.2% in 1998–99 to 33.5% in 2007–08). Again, these changes reflect the differences observed in the sample frame from Medicare data. Since 1998–99, the proportion of GPs aged less than 35 years and 35–44 years decreased from 14.8% and 33.4%, respectively, to 7.0% and 21.8%, respectively, in 2007–08. Over the same period, the proportion of GPs in the Medicare data sample frame aged 45–54 years increased from 29.5% to 34.8%, and those aged 55 years and over, from 22.4% to 36.4% (1998–99 data from Table 4.1 in *General practice activity in Australia 1998–99*¹⁷ and 2007–08 data from Table 3.2 *General practice activity in Australia 2007–08*).⁷ (For further information see Charles et al. *The independent effect of age of general practitioner on clinical practice*¹⁸ and *The evolution of the general practice workforce in Australia, 1991–2003*.¹⁹)
- Reflecting the change in age distribution, the proportion of GPs working in general practice for fewer than 2 years has decreased, from 0.8% in 1998–99 to 0.6% in 2007–08, and the proportion practising for 20 years and over has increased, from 42.2% to 55.9%. There has also been a decrease in the proportion working in general practice for 11–19 years, from 33.7% in 1998–99 to 20.6% in 2007–08.
- The proportion of GPs working fewer than six sessions per week has increased considerably, and the proportion working 11 or more sessions per week has decreased significantly. This was thought to partially reflect the larger proportion of female GPs working part-time in conjunction with motherhood. However, Charles et al. (2004) found that, while female GPs were much more likely than males to work fewer sessions, no significant change had occurred in the proportion of female GPs working part-time between 1999 and 2003. They found the proportion of males working fewer than six sessions per week rose from 6.1% in 1998–99 to 11.4% in 2002–03.¹⁹ There has also been a significant increase in the proportion of GPs working 6–10 sessions per week, from

68.5% in 1998–99 to 73.9% in 2007–08. The proportion of GPs working 11 or more sessions per week decreased by nearly half, from 19.0% to 10.9% over this period.

- The proportion of participants in solo practice has halved between 1998–99 and 2006–07, and the proportion in smaller practices of 2–4 GPs has also decreased considerably. There has been an associated significant increase in the proportion of GPs working in practices with five or more practitioners, from 38.9% in 1998–99 to 56.1% in 2006–07. From 2007–08, the question was altered to capture full-time equivalent GPs at the practice, so data are no longer comparable for the question in its original format.
- The results for consultations in a language other than English reflect a change in question design. Between 1998–99 and 2000–01 GPs were asked only one question: ‘Do you conduct more than 50% of consultations in a language other than English?’. The question was removed for the following 2 years, but was replaced as the issue again became of interest. A new question was designed to collect more specific data. The recent results suggest that about one-quarter of participants provide some consultations in a language other than English, but few are doing so at more than 50% of their consultations. It would appear that, in the survey’s original format, those GPs who did consult in another language were keen to let that be known, and the ‘> 50%’ category was the only avenue available to them.



(a) Data about after-hours services were only collected from 2000–01 onward. This figure compares the results from 2000–01 and 2007–08.

Note: Wk—week; FRACGP—Fellows of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners; Own after-hours—the practice provides its own after-hours service for their patients; Co-op after-hours—the practice provides after-hours services in a cooperative arrangement with other practices.

- There was no significant change over the decade in the proportions of Australian trained GPs compared with those who had graduated outside Australia ($p = 0.121$). However, there was a significant change in the geographic distribution of country of graduation for those trained overseas ($p = 0.003$).
- The proportion of GP participants holding Fellowship of the RACGP significantly increased, from 27.3% in 1998–99 to 50.2% in 2007–08.
- Although the data period covers only 8 years, there has been a significant reduction ($p = <0.001$) in the proportion of GPs providing their own after-hours services, from 45.5% in 2000–01 to 33.2% in 2007–08, and those who provide after-hours services in cooperation with other practices, from 19.3% in 2000–01 to 11.3% in 2007–08.
- Over the same period there has been a significant increase in the proportion of GPs with a computer available at their major practice address, for either administrative or clinical use, or both, from 87.4% in 2000–01 to 96.7% in 2007–08.

Table 4.1: GP characteristics, summary of annual results, BEACH, 1998–99 to 2007–08

| GP characteristic | Per cent of GPs ^(a) | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | 1998–99 (n = 984) | 1999–00 (n = 1,047) | 2000–01 (n = 999) | 2001–02 (n = 983) | 2002–03 (n = 1,008) | 2003–04 (n = 1,000) | 2004–05 (n = 953) | 2005–06 (n = 1,017) | 2006–07 (n = 930) | 2007–08 (n = 953) |
| Sex ($\chi^2 = 10.22, p < 0.001$) (missing n) | (0) | (0) | (0) | (0) | (0) | (0) | (0) | (0) | (0) | (0) |
| Male | 70.0 | 69.6 | 68.4 | 64.2 | 64.8 | 67.3 | 67.9 | 62.8 | 65.9 | 63.2 |
| Female | 30.0 | 30.4 | 31.6 | 35.8 | 35.2 | 32.7 | 32.1 | 37.2 | 34.1 | 36.8 |
| Age ($\chi^2 = 48.06, p < 0.001$) (missing n) | (4) | (4) | (9) | (1) | (0) | (1) | (1) | (18) | (11) | (8) |
| < 35 years | 6.3 | 8.4 | 6.7 | 7.1 | 7.3 | 5.8 | 8.9 | 4.7 | 6.7 | 7.8 |
| 35–44 years | 36.3 | 32.4 | 28.4 | 26.8 | 26.6 | 24.9 | 25.5 | 22.3 | 22.6 | 22.2 |
| 45–54 years | 32.1 | 32.4 | 34.2 | 36.5 | 35.2 | 36.5 | 31.8 | 34.2 | 35.6 | 36.4 |
| 55+ years | 25.2 | 26.7 | 29.7 | 29.5 | 30.9 | 32.7 | 33.6 | 38.7 | 35.0 | 33.5 |
| Years in general practice ($\chi^2 = 63.86, p < 0.001$) (missing n) | (12) | (8) | (6) | (4) | (6) | (9) | (5) | (13) | (13) | (7) |
| < 2 years | 0.8 | 0.7 | 0.5 | 0.3 | 0.6 | 1.3 | 0.4 | 0.6 | 0.5 | 0.6 |
| 2–5 years | 6.1 | 8.0 | 6.4 | 7.2 | 7.5 | 5.3 | 10.3 | 4.9 | 7.9 | 9.9 |
| 6–10 years | 17.2 | 15.9 | 13.7 | 13.4 | 13.5 | 10.7 | 12.6 | 12.1 | 11.1 | 12.9 |
| 11–19 years | 33.7 | 31.9 | 29.9 | 28.4 | 28.0 | 28.1 | 25.4 | 24.0 | 23.4 | 20.6 |
| 20+ years | 42.2 | 43.5 | 48.8 | 50.3 | 50.4 | 54.6 | 51.3 | 58.5 | 57.0 | 55.9 |
| Currently in a general practice vocational training program ($\chi^2 = 1.008, p = 0.316$) | 2.2 | 2.2 | 2.5 | 2.5 | 2.9 | 4.4 | 3.5 | 2.6 | 2.9 | 2.8 |
| Fellow of RACGP ($\chi^2 = 112.73, p < 0.001$) | 27.3 | 31.0 | 31.4 | 35.1 | 35.5 | 33.5 | 42.3 | 40.7 | 46.3 | 50.2 |

(continued)

Table 4.1 (continued): GP characteristics, summary of annual results, BEACH, 1998–99 to 2007–08

| GP characteristic | Per cent of GPs ^(a) | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | 1998–99 (n = 984) | 1999–00 (n = 1,047) | 2000–01 (n = 999) | 2001–02 (n = 983) | 2002–03 (n = 1,008) | 2003–04 (n = 1,000) | 2004–05 (n = 953) | 2005–06 (n = 1,017) | 2006–07 (n = 930) | 2007–08 (n = 953) |
| Sessions per week ($\chi^2 = 32.45, p < 0.001$) (missing n) | (12) | (6) | (16) | (15) | (8) | (7) | (8) | (6) | (7) | (9) |
| < 6 per week | 12.4 | 15.3 | 15.9 | 16.0 | 18.7 | 17.2 | 14.4 | 17.3 | 17.0 | 15.4 |
| 6–10 per week | 68.5 | 66.0 | 66.3 | 67.8 | 67.9 | 68.2 | 71.2 | 70.7 | 73.3 | 73.9 |
| 11+ per week | 19.0 | 18.3 | 16.2 | 14.8 | 13.4 | 13.6 | 11.4 | 12.0 | 9.6 | 10.9 |
| Size of practice—Number of GPs ($\chi^2 = 38.33, p < 0.001$) (missing n) | (62) | (5) | (28) | (4) | (8) | (10) | (6) | (9) | (6) | (6) |
| Solo | 17.9 | 18.1 | 19.3 | 15.3 | 13.7 | 10.6 | 12.2 | 13.1 | 8.2 | NAV |
| 2–4 GPs | 43.2 | 46.1 | 38.6 | 39.7 | 38.4 | 37.8 | 36.4 | 35.2 | 35.7 | NAV |
| 5+ GPs | 38.9 | 35.8 | 42.1 | 44.7 | 47.9 | 51.6 | 51.3 | 51.7 | 56.1 | NAV |
| Size of practice—Full-time equivalents (missing n) | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | (23) |
| < 2 | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | 17.6 |
| 2– < 5 GPs | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | 41.2 |
| 5– < 10 GPs | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | 31.9 |
| 10+ GPs | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | 9.2 |
| Consultations in languages other than English (missing n) ^(b) | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | (6) | (1) | (10) | (0) | (4) |
| < 25% | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | 17.8 | 21.7 | 21.0 | 18.1 | 20.4 |
| 25–50% | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | NAV | 2.9 | 2.4 | 3.6 | 2.7 | 3.0 |
| > 50% | 11.3 | 10.6 | 13.5 | NAV | NAV | 2.4 | 3.4 | 3.4 | 2.9 | 3.6 |

(continued)

Table 4.1 (continued): GP characteristics, summary of annual results, BEACH, 1998–99 to 2007–08

| GP characteristic | Per cent of GPs ^(a) | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | 1998–99 (n = 984) | 1999–00 (n = 1,047) | 2000–01 (n = 999) | 2001–02 (n = 983) | 2002–03 (n = 1,008) | 2003–04 (n = 1,000) | 2004–05 (n = 953) | 2005–06 (n = 1,017) | 2006–07 (n = 930) | 2007–08 (n = 953) |
| Place of graduation ($\chi^2 = 19.7$, $p = 0.12$; 0.003) (missing n) ^(c) | (4) | (2) | (0) | (0) | (0) | (1) | (1) | (6) | (1) | (3) |
| Australia | 76.5 | 73.3 | 72.7 | 76.1 | 72.6 | 73.5 | 69.8 | 72.0 | 73.6 | 73.5 |
| Overseas | 23.5 | 26.7 | 27.3 | 23.9 | 27.4 | 26.5 | 30.2 | 28.0 | 26.4 | 26.8 |
| United Kingdom | 9.0 | 8.5 | 8.2 | 7.6 | 9.1 | 7.2 | 7.6 | 8.1 | 7.3 | 6.8 |
| Asia | 8.6 | 9.4 | 4.7 | 8.6 | 9.9 | 9.5 | 10.9 | 10.9 | 10.1 | 9.8 |
| Europe | 2.4 | 1.9 | 1.9 | 1.8 | 1.6 | 2.3 | 3.8 | 2.1 | 1.7 | 2.6 |
| Africa | 1.5 | 2.4 | 1.5 | 3.7 | 4.3 | 5.4 | 5.4 | 4.5 | 5.1 | 4.3 |
| New Zealand | 1.1 | 1.5 | 1.5 | 0.5 | 2.2 | 1.0 | 1.3 | 1.9 | 1.4 | 1.4 |
| Other | 0.9 | 2.8 | 9.5 | 1.6 | 0.9 | 1.0 | 1.3 | 0.6 | 0.8 | 0.5 |
| Practice location by RRMA ($\chi^2 = 5.78$, $p = 0.447$) (missing n) | (0) | (0) | (0) | (1) | (0) | (2) | (1) | (1) | (0) | (1) |
| Capital | 68.2 | 65.2 | 68.1 | 69.3 | 64.7 | 62.4 | 64.9 | 69.1 | 63.9 | 67.8 |
| Other metropolitan | 7.5 | 7.4 | 6.9 | 8.1 | 8.5 | 6.4 | 6.7 | 6.8 | 7.3 | 7.0 |
| Large rural | 6.2 | 7.6 | 5.6 | 5.9 | 5.1 | 7.0 | 5.4 | 5.7 | 7.9 | 6.9 |
| Small rural | 6.1 | 6.2 | 5.6 | 4.9 | 7.7 | 7.0 | 6.9 | 6.0 | 5.4 | 4.7 |
| Other rural | 11.0 | 12.2 | 12.2 | 10.5 | 12.0 | 14.2 | 13.0 | 11.1 | 13.6 | 11.3 |
| Remote central | 0.5 | 0.4 | 1.0 | 0.5 | 0.6 | 0.9 | 1.3 | 0.5 | 1.0 | 0.7 |
| Other remote, offshore | 0.5 | 1.0 | 0.7 | 0.8 | 1.4 | 2.0 | 1.8 | 0.8 | 1.1 | 1.5 |

(continued)

Table 4.1 (continued): GP characteristics, summary of annual results, BEACH, 1998–99 to 2007–08

| GP characteristic | Per cent of GPs ^(a) | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | 1998–99 (n = 984) | 1999–00 (n = 1,047) | 2000–01 (n = 999) | 2001–02 (n = 983) | 2002–03 (n = 1,008) | 2003–04 (n = 1,000) | 2004–05 (n = 953) | 2005–06 (n = 1,017) | 2006–07 (n = 930) | 2007–08 (n = 953) |
| Practice location by ASGC ($\chi^2 = 3.53$, $p = 0.472$) (missing n) | | | | | | | | | | |
| Major cities | 0 | 0 | (1) | (0) | (0) | (2) | (2) | (0) | (0) | (1) |
| Inner regional | 70.9 | 68.6 | 70.9 | 71.4 | 69.4 | 65.4 | 67.6 | 72.1 | 66.3 | 72.2 |
| Outer regional | 18.2 | 20.3 | 18.9 | 17.3 | 19.1 | 21.8 | 20.1 | 18.8 | 22.7 | 17.4 |
| Remote | 9.6 | 9.7 | 8.4 | 10.1 | 9.3 | 10.1 | 10.1 | 7.8 | 9.4 | 8.6 |
| Very remote | 1.2 | 1.2 | 1.4 | 0.9 | 1.6 | 1.6 | 1.5 | 0.8 | 1.3 | 1.3 |
| After-hours arrangements ($\chi^2 = 57.07$, $p < 0.001$) ^(e) | 0.1 | 0.2 | 0.3 | 0.3 | 0.7 | 1.0 | 0.7 | 0.6 | 0.3 | 0.5 |
| Practice does its own | NAV | NAV | (0) | (0) | (5) | (5) | (8) | (14) | (3) | (6) |
| Cooperative with other practices | NAV | NAV | 45.5 | 41.6 | 42.8 | 43.6 | 35.9 | 34.6 | 34.6 | 33.2 |
| Computer use at practice ($\chi^2 = 57.07$, $p < 0.001$) ^(e) | NAV | NAV | 19.3 | 19.4 | 16.7 | 20.0 | 16.2 | 15.7 | 15.5 | 11.3 |
| | NAV | NAV | 87.4 | 89.7 | 91.3 | 95.0 | 93.7 | 96.4 | 96.6 | 96.7 |

(a) Missing data removed.

(b) Multiple responses were allowed.

(c) $p = 0.12^*$ - no significant difference when comparing Australia with all overseas countries of GP origin; $p = 0.003^*$ - significant difference within the distribution of overseas countries of GP origin.

(d) Data for all three groupings only available from 2003–04.

(e) Data refer to computer use at the major practice and may not reflect the use of computers by individual GPs.

Note: NAV—not available; RRMA—Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas classification; ASGC—Australian Standard Geographical Classification; RACGP—Royal Australian College of General Practitioners.