

Appendix 3

BETTERING THE EVALUATION AND CARE OF HEALTH (BEACH®)

A NATIONAL SURVEY OF MORBIDITY AND ITS MANAGEMENT IN GENERAL PRACTICE

Your name was drawn from a random sample of all practising recognised GPs in Australia and we invite you to work with us on this study. The project is called *BEACH*®, and uses the new version of the Morbidity and Therapeutic Index (MTI) which we have offered throughout the 90s as a quality assurance option through the RACGP's QA program. **Participation in *BEACH*® earns you 25 clinical audit points. It is free of charge** because this National survey is funded by a consortium (see below).

What would you need to do? Complete a form for each of 100 consecutive patients, recording such details as age and sex of patient, reasons for encounter, diagnoses, medications and other treatments provided. In this study we are also gathering extremely valuable data on the health status of patients attending general practice, so at the bottom of each form there are a few varying questions to ask the patient.

An example of a recording form is enclosed for your information. Please do not be daunted by its seeming complexity. Although there are four boxes for problems managed, at most encounters you will have only one or two to record. Likewise, although there are four spaces to record medications for each problem, in many cases there will be only one or two, or in fact none, to record. It is estimated that each form would take you between one and two minutes to complete. A clear and comprehensive set of instructions will be included with your pad of forms.

What would you gain from the study? In return for your time you will receive a report containing a detailed profile of your practice, a comparison with nine other de-identified participants and the cumulative average of the results from all participants. We will also provide some resource material related to alcohol consumption and smoking. Then you will need to fill in a short final questionnaire about your results to satisfy the RACGP requirements for points allocation.

Why do we need to carry out this study? There are over 100 million consultations conducted in Australia by general practitioners every year. What do we know about the problems managed at these consultations or about the treatments and other services provided by general practitioners? Very little! We conducted the last study eight years ago. National general practice data is vital to the future of general practice in its negotiations with government.

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The General Practice Statistics and Classification Unit is a collaborating Unit of the University of Sydney and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. The Unit's major objective is to ensure sufficient information is available about the problems managed and treatments provided in general practice in Australia. To that end we are collecting de-identified data from a "rolling" random sample of GPs across the country at a rate of 20 per week – about 1,000 GPs per year.

BEACH[®] follows methods similar to those of the Australian Morbidity and Treatment Survey which we conducted in 1990-91. Each GP completes details about 100 consecutive encounters (wherever they may occur) on structured encounter forms, resulting in a database of 100,000 consultations. The uses to which this large de-identified data base will be put are varied. Firstly an overall report of the activities of general practice will be published each year as part of the AIHW annual publication, *Australia's Health*. We will be investigating changes which have occurred in general practice since the last National study. The data will be used by all organisations contributing to the **BEACH**[®] program costs. In order to support further research and development in general practice and to aid planning for better health, data may be supplied to other interested parties. At no time will any data be supplied in a form which could identify an individual GP.

In about a week a research assistant from the Unit will contact you by telephone to ascertain your availability and willingness to take part in this study. If you prefer, please ring us on our toll free number **1800 62 73 75**. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. We would greatly appreciate your involvement in this project.

Yours sincerely

Dr Helena Britt
Director
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The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners encourages GP participation in *Beach*[®].

The *Beach*[®] program is endorsed by the Australian Medical Association.

- This project has been approved by the Health Ethics Committee of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Sydney.
- The data is being collected under the AIHW ACT 1987 and in accordance with the Privacy Act 1988.
- **BEACH**[®] is overseen by a Program Advisory Board comprising representatives of the University of Sydney, the AIHW, each contributing organisation, the RACGP, the AMA, Divisions of General Practice and the Consumer Health Forum.

Organisations contributing to the considerable cost of the **BEACH[®] program are:**

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| ♦The National Occupational Health and Safety Commission | ♦Astra Pharmaceuticals |
| ♦The Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services | ♦Roche Products Pty Ltd |
| ♦The Department of Veterans' Affairs | ♦Rhône-Poulenc Rorer |

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Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of this study can contact the Manager of Ethics and Biosafety Administration, University of Sydney on (02) 9351 4811