

4 The participating GPs

This chapter reports data collected between April 2007 and March 2008 about the participating GPs and their practices from the 10th year of the BEACH program. Data on GP and practice characteristics are reported for each year from 1998–99 to 2007–08 in the 10 year summary report *General practice activity in Australia 1998–99 to 2007–08: 10 year data tables* available from <www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/subject/19> (AIHW catalogue number GEP 23).

4.1 Characteristics of the GP participants

All participants returned a GP profile questionnaire, although some were incomplete. The results are provided in Table 4.1. Of the 953 participants:

- 63% were male, and 34% were aged 55 years or older
- more than half had been in general practice for more than 20 years
- almost 60% were in practices of fewer than five full-time equivalent GPs
- 74% had graduated in Australia
- 72% practised in major cities (classified using the Australian Standard Geographical Classification)
- 27% conducted some consultations in a language other than English
- 50% were Fellows of the RACGP
- 86% worked in an accredited practice
- 71% worked in a practice that employed practice nurse(s)
- 74% worked 6–10 clinical sessions per week, 15% worked fewer than six sessions per week, and only 11% worked more than 10 sessions per week.
- 39% spent more than 40 hours each week on direct patient care services
- two in five had provided care in a residential aged care facility in the previous month
- 45% provided their own or cooperative after-hours care, and two in five employed a deputising service for after-hours patient care (multiple responses allowed)
- over one-quarter (27%) bulk-billed Medicare for all patients; 47% bulk-billed for all consultations with pensioner/Commonwealth concession cardholders, and one-third (36%) bulk-billed for all consultations with children (multiple responses allowed)
- more than half (55%) worked in a teaching practice for undergraduates or registrars, or both.

Those interested in the clinical activity of overseas trained doctors will find more information in Bayram et al. *Clinical activity of overseas-trained doctors practising in general practice in Australia*.⁵¹

Readers interested in the effects of GP age on clinical practice will find more information in Charles et al. *The independent effect of age of general practitioner on clinical practice*.⁵²

Table 4.1: Characteristics of participating GPs and their practices

GP characteristic		Number^(a)	Per cent of GPs^(a) (n = 953)
Sex	Male	602	63.2
	Female	351	36.8
Age (missing = 8)			
	< 35 years	74	7.8
	35–44 years	210	22.2
	45–54 years	344	36.4
	55+ years	317	33.5
Years in general practice (missing = 7)			
	< 2 years	6	0.6
	2–5 years	94	9.9
	6–10 years	122	12.9
	11–19 years	195	20.6
	20+ years	529	55.9
Size of practice—Full-time equivalent GPs (missing = 23)			
	< 2	164	17.6
	2–4	383	41.2
	5–9	297	31.9
	10+	86	9.2
Practice location by RRMA (missing = 1)			
	Capital	645	67.8
	Other metropolitan	67	7.0
	Large rural	66	6.9
	Small rural	45	4.7
	Other rural	108	11.3
	Remote central	7	0.7
	Other remote, offshore	14	1.5
Practice location by ASGC Remoteness structure (missing = 1)			
	Major cities	687	72.2
	Inner regional	166	17.4
	Outer regional	82	8.6
	Remote	12	1.3
	Very remote	5	0.5
Place of graduation (missing = 3)			
	Australia	698	73.5
	United Kingdom	65	6.8
	Asia	93	9.8
	Europe	25	2.6
	Africa	41	4.3
	New Zealand	13	1.4

(continued)

Table 4.1 (continued): Characteristics of participating GPs and their practices

GP characteristic	Number^(a)	Per cent of GPs^(a) (n = 953)
Consult in languages other than English (missing = 4)		
< 25% of consultations	194	20.4
25–50% of consultations	29	3.0
> 50% of consultations	34	3.6
Currently in general practice training program (missing = 4)	27	2.8
Fellow of RACGP (missing = 5)	476	50.2
Accredited practice (missing = 5)	818	86.3
Practice nurse at major practice address (missing = 3)	677	71.3
Sessions per week (missing = 9)		
< 6 per week	145	15.4
6–10 per week	696	73.9
11+ per week	103	10.9
Direct patient care hours (worked) per week (missing = 25)		
<= 10 hours	3	0.3
11–20 hours	81	8.7
21–40 hours	486	52.4
41–60 hours	298	32.1
60+ hours	60	6.5
Patient care provided in previous month ^(b) (missing = 14)		
As a locum	38	4.0
In a deputising service	24	2.5
In a residential aged care facility	392	41.6
As a salaried/sessional hospital medical officer	29	3.1
None of the above	456	48.4
After-hours arrangements ^(b) (missing = 6)		
Practice does its own	314	33.2
Cooperative with other practices	107	11.3
Deputing service	404	42.7
Referral to other service (e.g. emergency hospital department)	78	8.2
Other arrangement	26	2.7
Bulk-billing ^(b) (missing = 4)		
All patients	258	27.2
All pension/Commonwealth concession cardholders	442	46.6
Some pension/Commonwealth concession cardholders	197	20.8
All children	339	35.7
Some children	240	25.3
Selected other patients	560	59.0

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Table 4.1 (continued): Characteristics of participating GPs and their practices

GP characteristic	Number ^(a)	Per cent of GPs ^(a) (n = 953)
Major practice a teaching practice (missing = 5)		
Not a teaching practice	425	44.8
Yes—for undergraduates only	216	22.8
Yes—for GP registrars only	93	9.8
Yes—for both undergraduates and registrars	213	22.5

(a) Missing data removed.

(b) Multiple responses allowed.

Note: RRMA—Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas classification; ASGC—Australian Standard Geographical Classification; RACGP—Royal Australian College of General Practitioners.

4.2 Computer use at GP practices

Table 4.2 shows the proportion of participating GPs who worked in a practice in which computers were used for each of five listed activities. Note that these results refer to computer availability or use at the practice level and may not reflect the use of computers by individual GPs.

Information about reported individual GP's use of computers at the practice can be found in Henderson et al. *Extent and utilisation of computerisation in Australian general practice*.⁵³ Those interested in the effect of computerisation on quality of care in general practice will find more detailed information in Henderson *The effect of computerisation on the quality of care in Australian general practice*.⁵⁴

Table 4.2 shows that:

- only 3.3% of GPs worked in a non-computerised practice
- computers were used mainly for prescribing and billing
- four-fifths had computers available for other administrative purposes
- more than four-fifths had computers available for medical records
- nearly four-fifths were in practices that had Internet and/or email available.

Table 4.2: Computer applications available/used at major practice address

Computer use	Number	Per cent of GPs (n = 953) ^(a)	Per cent of GPs with computers (n = 922) ^(a)
Not at all	31	3.3	—
Prescribing	845	89.3	92.3
Billing	818	86.5	89.4
Medical records	783	82.8	85.6
Other administrative	765	80.9	83.6
Internet/email	746	78.9	81.5
Missing	7	—	—

(a) Missing data removed.

Table 4.3 lists the top 10 combinations of computer use by participants' practices.

- 63% of GPs indicated that their practice used computers for all five listed purposes – billing, prescribing, medical records, other administrative purposes and Internet/email.
- Within the top 10 combinations, 70% of GPs reported computer availability/use for both medical records and Internet/email purposes.
- Prescribing was the only application included in all of the top 10 combinations of availability/use.
- Billing was the second most frequently available function, with medical records third, and Internet/email use ranking fourth.

Table 4.3: Top 10 combinations of computer applications at major practice address

Combination	Number	Per cent of GPs (n = 953)^(a)	Per cent of GPs with computers (n = 922)^(a)
All five uses	600	63.4	65.6
Billing + prescribing + medical records + other administrative	57	6.0	6.2
Billing + prescribing + other admin + Internet/email	35	3.7	3.8
Billing + prescribing + medical records + Internet/email	31	3.3	3.4
Billing + prescribing + medical records	25	2.6	2.7
Billing + prescribing	16	1.7	1.7
Prescribing + medical records + other admin + Internet/email	15	1.6	1.6
Prescribing + medical records + Internet/email	14	1.5	1.5
Billing + prescribing + Internet/email	14	1.5	1.5
Billing + prescribing + other administrative	7	0.7	0.8

(a) Missing data removed.