

# 10 Non-pharmacological management

For each problem managed, GPs could record up to two non-pharmacological treatments provided at the encounter. These were divided into two categories:

- clinical treatments, including general and specific advice, counselling or education, family planning and administrative processes. Non-pharmacological treatments classified as 'clinical' are listed in Appendix 3; and
- procedural treatments, which encompassed all procedures carried out by general practitioners such as excision of skin lesion or application/removal of plaster cast. The procedural codes and groupings are listed in Appendix 3.

Observations of the patient such as measurements of blood pressure, regarded as routine clinical measurements, were not included in the data collection program.

Non-pharmacological treatments were frequently provided by general practitioners to manage patient morbidity. A total of 50,308 were recorded for the year, a rate of 51.9 per 100 encounters and 36.2 per 100 problems managed. A breakdown of the non-pharmacological treatments showed that clinical treatments were far more common than procedural treatments (Table 10.1).

**Table 10.1: Non-pharmacological treatments – summary table**

	Number	Rate per 100 encs <sup>(a)</sup> (n=96,973)	95% LCL	95% UCL	Rate per 100 problems <sup>(a)</sup> (n=139,092)	95% LCL	95% UCL
Non-pharmacological treatments	50,308	51.9	49.6	54.2	36.2	34.7	37.7
Clinical treatments	36,909	38.1	36.1	40.1	26.5	25.2	27.9
Procedural treatments	13,399	13.8	13.1	14.5	9.6	9.1	10.1

(a) Figures do not total 100.0 as more than one treatment can be described at each encounter and for each problem.  
 Note: Encs—encounters, UCL—upper confidence limit, LCL—lower confidence limit.

Table 10.2 shows the proportion of problems for which at least one non-pharmacological treatment was given. Pharmacological and non-pharmacological treatments were often combined to manage the presenting problem. However, for more than half of the problems that were managed with at least one non-pharmacological treatment, no pharmacological treatment was provided. At least one non-pharmacological treatment was used in the management of 31.4% of problems, and for 18.4% of problems non-pharmacological treatment was not accompanied by any medication.

One in five problems were managed with a clinical treatment and for over half of these (55.5%) no pharmacological treatments were used. For less than one in ten problems, the GP used a procedural treatment, and for about two-thirds of them (66.2%) no medications were provided. The results presented in Table 10.2 also indicate that problems managed with a procedure were less likely to have concomitant pharmacological treatment than were those managed with a clinical treatment (66.2% compared with 55.5%).

**Table 10.2: Relationship of non-pharmacological management with pharmacological treatments**

Co-management of problems with non-pharmacological treatments	Number of problems	Per cent within class	Per cent of problems (n=139,092)	95% LCL	95% UCL
At least one non-pharmacological treatment	43,699	100.0	31.4	30.2	32.6
<b>Without</b> pharmacological treatment	25,662	58.7	18.4	17.7	19.2
At least one clinical treatment	32,540	100.0	23.4	22.3	24.5
<b>Without</b> pharmacological treatment	18,064	55.5	13.0	12.4	13.6
At least one procedural treatment	12,665	100.0	9.1	8.6	9.6
<b>Without</b> pharmacological treatment	8,385	66.2	6.0	5.7	6.3

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

## 10.1 Clinical treatments

The total number of clinical treatments provided by GPs was 36,909, at a rate of 38.1 per 100 encounters (Table 10.1).

### Most frequent clinical treatments

The three most common clinical treatments were advice and education in general (12.1% of total non-pharmacological treatments), advice/counselling pertaining to nutrition and weight (10.6%), and advice and education on the management of the patient’s problem (9.8%).

General advice/education was provided at a rate of 6.3 per 100 encounters, while advice on nutrition was given at a rate of 5.5 and treatment advice at a rate of 5.1 per 100 encounters. Counselling on the problem managed (4.7 per 100 encounters), psychological counselling (3.2) and advice on medication (2.8) were also frequently provided. Table 10.3 lists a range of clinical treatments provided in order of decreasing frequency. These treatments relate to various aspects of health, such as medication, alcohol use, smoking, exercise, lifestyle, occupational and relationship issues.

**Table 10.3: Most frequent clinical treatments**

Treatment	Number	Per cent of non-pharmacological treatments (n=50,308)	Rate per 100 encounters <sup>(a)</sup> (n=96,973)	95% LCL	95% UCL
Advice/education*	6,090	12.1	6.3	5.4	7.1
Counsel/advice—nutrition/weight*	5,318	10.6	5.5	5.0	6.0
Advice/education—treatment*	4,953	9.8	5.1	4.5	5.7
Counselling—problem*	4,514	9.0	4.7	3.8	5.5
Counselling—psychological*	3,056	6.1	3.2	2.8	3.5
Advice/education—medication*	2,755	5.5	2.8	2.5	3.2
Counsel/advice—exercise*	2,004	4.0	2.1	1.6	2.5
Other admin/document*	1,497	3.0	1.5	1.3	1.8
Reassurance, support	1,446	2.9	1.5	1.0	1.9

(continued)

**Table 10.3 (continued): Most frequent clinical treatments**

Treatment	Number	Per cent of non-pharmacological treatments (n=50,308)	Rate per 100 encounters <sup>(a)</sup> (n=96,973)	95% LCL	95% UCL
Sickness certificate	1,049	2.1	1.1	0.5	1.6
Counsel/advice—smoking*	772	1.5	0.8	0.6	1.0
Counsel/advice—lifestyle*	427	0.9	0.4	0.0	1.0
Counsel/advice—alcohol*	370	0.7	0.4	0.2	0.6
Counsel/advice—relaxation*	343	0.7	0.4	0.1	0.6
Counsel/advice—health/body*	317	0.6	0.3	0.1	0.6
Family planning*	316	0.6	0.3	0.1	0.6
Observe/wait*	299	0.6	0.3	0.0	0.7
Counsel/advice—prevention*	292	0.6	0.3	0.0	0.6
Counsel/advice—pregnancy*	255	0.5	0.3	0.0	0.5
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>36,071</i>	<i>71.7</i>	<i>..</i>	<i>..</i>	<i>..</i>
<i>Total clinical treatments</i>	<i>36,909</i>	<i>73.4</i>	<i>38.1</i>	<i>36.1</i>	<i>40.1</i>
<b>Total non-pharmacological treatment</b>	<b>50,308</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>51.9</b>	<b>49.6</b>	<b>54.2</b>

(a) Figures do not total 100.0 as more than one treatment can be recorded at each encounter.

\* Includes multiple ICPC-2 or ICPC-2 PLUS codes (see Appendix 3).

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

## Problems managed with clinical treatments

A total of 32,540 problems included a clinical treatment as part of their management. The ten most common accounted for almost one-third (30.8%) of all problems for which a clinical treatment was provided. The problem most often managed with a clinical treatment was URTI (5.9% of problems managed with a clinical treatment), followed by depression (5.2%), hypertension (4.0%) and lipid disorder (3.0%) (Table 10.4).

The two right-hand columns in Table 10.4 show the extent to which a clinical treatment was used for that problem and the relationship between the use of a clinical treatment and a medication. It can be seen that 50.5% of depression contacts were managed with a clinical treatment, most probably counselling, and of these 45.3% were not given a prescription as part of the treatment. Likewise, 50.9% of anxiety was managed with a clinical treatment and 57.8% of these did not receive a medication. Asthma was less likely to be managed with a clinical treatment (23.4%) and less likely to be managed without medication when clinical treatment was given.

**Table 10.4: The ten most common problems managed with a clinical treatment**

Problem managed	Number	Per cent of problems with clinical treatment <sup>(a)</sup>	Rate per 100 encounters <sup>(b)</sup> (n=96,973)	95% LCL	95% UCL	Per cent this problem <sup>(c)</sup>	Per cent of treated problems—no meds <sup>(d)</sup>
Upper respiratory infection, acute	1,910	5.9	2.0	1.6	2.4	31.6	48.6
Depression*	1,681	5.2	1.7	1.5	1.9	50.5	45.3
Hypertension*	1,307	4.0	1.4	1.1	1.6	15.0	43.1
Lipid disorder	988	3.0	1.0	0.8	1.2	34.8	60.0
Diabetes*	966	3.0	1.0	0.8	1.2	32.3	59.9
Anxiety*	808	2.5	0.8	0.7	1.0	50.9	57.8
Asthma	643	2.0	0.7	0.4	0.9	23.3	26.0
Back complaint*	573	1.8	0.6	0.4	0.8	22.6	48.0
Gastroenteritis, presumed infection	569	1.8	0.6	0.4	0.8	55.0	53.8
Sprain/Strain*	552	1.7	0.6	0.4	0.8	31.6	53.9
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>9,997</i>	<i>30.8</i>	<i>..</i>	<i>..</i>	<i>..</i>	<i>..</i>	<i>..</i>
<b>Total problems</b>	<b>32,540</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>33.6</b>	<b>31.9</b>	<b>35.2</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>..</b>

(a) Figures do not total 100.0 as more than one treatment can be recorded at each encounter.

(b) Rate of provision of clinical treatment for selected problem per 100 total encounters.

(c) Per cent of contacts with this problem that generated at least one clinical treatment.

(d) Per cent of contacts with problems that generated at least one clinical treatment without the provision of pharmacological treatment.

\* Includes multiple ICPC-2 or ICPC-2 PLUS codes (see Appendix 3).

Note: LCL—lower confidence limit, UCL—upper confidence limit, meds—medications.

## 10.2 Procedural treatments

### Number of procedures at encounter

Procedural treatments included therapeutic actions and diagnostic procedures undertaken by the GP. ICPC-2 codes were grouped across ICPC-2 chapters for this analysis due to small numbers within each chapter. There were 13,399 procedural treatments recorded, at a rate of 13.8 per 100 encounters (Table 10.1).

### Most frequent procedures

Table 10.5 lists the most frequent therapeutic procedures. The most common procedure was the excision or removal of tissue (including destruction, debridement or cauterisation). It accounted for 5.3% of all non-pharmacological treatments and occurred at a rate of 2.7 per 100 encounters. This was followed by physical medicine or rehabilitation (including physiotherapy, massage and therapeutic exercises) which occurred at a rate of 2.2 per 100 encounters, and accounted for 4.2% of all non-pharmacological treatments.

Diagnostic procedures included taking Pap smears, physical function tests such as peak flow readings, and electrical tracings. These results do not reflect the true rate of, for example, Pap smears because most diagnostic tests were recorded in the Investigation section of the recording form and are therefore described in Chapter 12—Investigations.

**Table 10.5: Most frequent procedural treatments**

Treatment	Number	Per cent of non-pharmacological treatments	Rate per 100 encounters <sup>(a)</sup> (n=96,973)	95% LCL	95% UCL
Excision/removal tissue/biopsy/destruction/debridement/cauterisation*	2,653	5.3	2.7	2.4	3.0
Physical medicine/rehabilitation*	2,107	4.2	2.2	1.8	2.6
Dressing/pressure/compression/tamponade*	1,742	3.5	1.8	1.6	2.0
Other therapeutic procedures/surgery NEC*	1,361	2.7	1.4	0.8	2.0
Local injection/infiltration*	1,119	2.2	1.2	0.5	1.8
Incision/drainage/flushing/aspiration/removal body fluid*	1,114	2.2	1.2	1.0	1.3
Pap smear	865	1.7	0.9	0.6	1.1
Repair/fixation-suture/cast/prosthetic device (apply/remove)*	858	1.7	0.9	0.7	1.0
Physical function test*	399	0.8	0.4	0.0	0.9
Pregnancy test*	252	0.5	0.3	0.0	0.5
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>12,468</i>	<i>24.8</i>	<i>..</i>	<i>..</i>	<i>..</i>
<i>Total procedural treatments</i>	<i>13,399</i>	<i>26.6</i>	<i>13.8</i>	<i>13.1</i>	<i>14.5</i>
<b>Total non-pharmacological treatment</b>	<b>50,308</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>51.9</b>	<b>49.6</b>	<b>54.2</b>

(a) Figures do not total 100.0 as more than one treatment can be described for each problem and only per cents >=0.5% included.

\* Includes multiple ICPC-2 or ICPC-2 PLUS codes (see Appendix 5).

Note: LCL—lower confidence limit, UCL—upper confidence limit, NEC—not elsewhere classified.

## Problems managed with a procedural treatment

A total of 12,665 problems involved a procedure in their management. The top ten problems accounted for 37.3% of all problems for which a procedure was used. These problems were commonly associated with skin complaints, injuries of various types, musculoskeletal problems and female genital check-ups (Table 10.6).

As was the case in 2000–01, solar keratosis/sunburn was the most common problem managed with a procedural treatment, accounting for 5.7% of problems managed with a procedural treatment. Other problems frequently managed with a procedure were female genital check-ups (4.6%), excessive ear wax (4.5%) and sprains/strains (4.2%).

Again, the two columns on the right side of the table show the proportion of the problem that was managed with a procedure and the rate of a problem being managed with a procedure without a concomitant medication. Many of the problems that were managed with a procedure did not have a medication prescribed, advised or given. Seventy-two per cent of solar keratoses cases were managed with a procedure and of these 98.0% did not have a medication associated with them.

**Table 10.6: The ten most common problems managed with a procedural treatment**

Problem managed	Number	Per cent of problems with procedure	Rate per 100 encounters <sup>(a) (b)</sup> (n=96,973)	95% LCL	95% UCL	Per cent of this problem <sup>(c)</sup>	Per cent of treated problems no meds <sup>(d)</sup>
Solar keratosis/sunburn	724	5.7	0.8	0.5	1.0	72.4	98.0
Female genital check-up*	586	4.6	0.6	0.3	0.9	38.4	93.4
Excessive ear wax	565	4.5	0.6	0.4	0.7	78.8	93.5
Sprain/Strain*	526	4.2	0.5	0.3	0.8	30.1	51.3
Warts	488	3.9	0.5	0.3	0.7	73.4	95.1
Laceration/cut	468	3.7	0.5	0.3	0.6	70.8	77.5
Back complaint*	450	3.6	0.5	0.2	0.8	17.7	49.8
Malignant neoplasm skin	349	2.8	0.4	0.0	0.8	42.1	98.3
Chronic ulcer skin (incl varicose ulcer)	309	2.4	0.3	0.1	0.5	60.5	78.1
Osteoarthritis*	254	2.0	0.3	0.0	0.6	10.1	42.7
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>4,719</i>	<i>37.3</i>	<i>..</i>	<i>..</i>	<i>..</i>	<i>..</i>	<i>..</i>
<b>Total problems</b>	<b>12,665</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>13.1</b>	<b>12.4</b>	<b>13.7</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>..</b>

(a) Figures do not total 100.0 as more than one treatment can be recorded at each encounter.

(b) Rate of provision of procedural treatment for selected problem per 100 total encounters.

(c) Percentage of contacts with this problem that generated at least one procedural treatment.

(d) Percentage of contacts with problems that generated at least one procedural treatment, without the provision of pharmacological treatment.

\* Includes multiple ICPC-2 or ICPC-2 PLUS codes (see Appendix 3).

Note: LCL—lower confidence limit, UCL—upper confidence limit, meds—medications.