

SAND abstract No. 57 from the BEACH program 2003–04

Subject: Prevalence and management of chronic heart failure in general practice patients

Organisation supporting this study: Roche Products Pty Ltd

Issues: Prevalence and severity of chronic heart failure (CHF) among general practice patients; types of management (whether the management was initiated by a GP or specialist, and the main objective of management); proportion of patients referred to a cardiac specialist; clinical investigations used to diagnose CHF.

Sample: 2,641 encounters from 91 GPs; data collection period: 06/05/2003–09/06/2003.

Method: Detailed in the paper entitled 'SAND Method 2003–04' on this website:
<http://www.fmrc.org.au/publications/SAND_abstracts.htm>.

Summary of results

The age-sex distribution of respondents was similar to the distribution of patients at all BEACH encounters, with the majority (56.6%) of patients being female.

The prevalence of CHF in this general practice patient population was estimated to be 4.5% (95% CI: 3.3–5.8). Mild CHF was diagnosed in 2.3% of patients, while 1.9% and 0.4% were diagnosed with moderate and severe CHF respectively. Males were more likely to be diagnosed with CHF (4.9% of male patients) than females (4.4% of female patients). Patients aged 75 years and over had the highest age-specific rate of CHF (17.9%).

The medications most commonly used for the control of CHF were Frusemide (28.0% of CHF medications), followed by Digoxin (10.1%), Ramipril (7.1%) and Spiractolone (7.1%). Pharmacological treatment was more likely to be initiated by a specialist (59.4% of medications) than by a GP (40.6%).

GPs considered the factors of 'symptom management' and 'quality of life' to be equally important in the management of CHF, but significantly more important than 'survival'.

The majority (83.5%) of patients diagnosed with CHF had been referred to a cardiac specialist; 69.6% of those with mild CHF, 95.9% with moderate CHF and 100% of patients with severe CHF.

Chest x-ray had been used to diagnose CHF in 78.3% of cases, ECHO had been used in 69.2% of cases and ECG in 66.7% of cases. GPs had ordered 50.6% of chest x-rays, 15.8% of ECHO and 41.6% of ECG, with cardiac specialists ordering the rest.

Correspondence to: Clare Bayram, GPSCU