

SAND abstract No. 63 from the BEACH program 2003–04

Subject: Asthma—prevalence, management and medication side-effects

Organisation supporting this study: Merck Sharp and Dohme (Australia) Pty Ltd

Issues: The prevalence and severity of asthma among general practice patients; the medications being utilised for asthma management; side effects of asthma medications.

Sample: 2,527 respondents from 87 GPs; data collection period: 23/9/2003–27/10/2003.

Method: Detailed in the paper entitled 'SAND Method 2003–04' on the FMRC 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 the total BEACH sample with the majority (56.6%) being female and those aged 25–44 and 45–64 years accounting for 24.3% and 27.0% of the patient population respectively.

A total of 367 patients (14.5%, 95% CI: 12.6–16.4) had asthma. No significant differences emerged in asthma prevalence for patients across age groups. There was also no significant difference between the prevalence for males (12.7%, 95% CI: 10.4–15.0) and females (15.9%, 95% CI: 13.5–18.2).

The majority of asthma cases were reported in the least severe categories for both adults and children. One in four children (23.0%) with asthma had frequent or persistent asthma, while 28.0% of adult asthma sufferers had asthma rated as moderate or severe.

Of the 367 patients with asthma, 52 (14.2%) were not currently taking any asthma medication. Salbutamol was the most common asthma medication, accounting for 45.1% (n=223) of all asthma medications. The fluticasone/salmeterol combination was the second most frequently used, accounting for 14.8% (n=73) of asthma medications. Budesonide, fluticasone propionate and terbutaline each accounted for approximately 7.5% of asthma medications being taken by these patients.

Of the 353 patients who provided responses about corticosteroid use, 17.9% (n=63) had been prescribed oral corticosteroids in the previous 12 months. Of the 337 patients who responded to the hospitalisation question, 7.7% (n=26) had been hospitalised for asthma during the previous 12 months.

Thirty-seven (11.8%) of the 315 patients taking at least one asthma medication reported a side effect. The most common side effect was hoarseness of voice (reported by 18 patients), most of these (n=13) being reported as mild. Sixteen patients reported 'other' side effects, the majority (8) of these being rated as moderate in severity. Height reduction was reported by 5 patients, 2 of which were rated as severe. Oral candidiasis was reported by 4 patients (all mild), and adrenal suppression was reported by 3 patients (all rated as moderate).

Correspondence to: Joan Henderson, GPSCU