

SAND abstract No. 75 from the BEACH program 2004–05

Subject: Prevalence, management and investigations for chronic heart failure

Organisations supporting this study: Roche Products Pty Ltd

Issues: Prevalence and severity of chronic heart failure (CHF) among patients attending general practice; 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: 2,735 respondents from 95 GPs; data collection period: 28/09/2004–01/11/2004.

Method: Detailed in the paper entitled 'SAND Method 2004–05' 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 (60.4%) of patients being female.

The prevalence of CHF among the 2,735 respondents was estimated to be 4.2% (95% CI: 3.1–5.2). Mild CHF was diagnosed in 2.2% of patients, while 1.4% and 0.6% were diagnosed with moderate and severe CHF respectively. Of male patients, 4.8% were diagnosed with CHF compared with 3.7% of female patients. Patients aged 75 years and over had the highest age-specific rate of CHF (18.1%).

The medications most commonly used for the control of CHF were frusemide (30.3% of CHF medications), followed by digoxin (8.8%), ramipril (8.0%) and perindopril (5.6%). Specialists initiated 59.4% of CHF medications and GPs initiated the remainder (40.6%).

GPs used a scoring system (1 = most important to 3 = least important) to rank the factors they considered most important in the management of CHF. The factors of 'symptom management' (score 1.4, 95% CI: 1.2–1.6) and 'quality of life' (score 1.6, 95% CI: 1.4–1.8) were rated equally important in the management of CHF, and these were significantly more important than 'survival' (score 2.2, 95% CI: 2.0–2.4).

The majority (85.1%) of patients diagnosed with CHF had been referred to a cardiac specialist: 46.7% were referred more than three years ago, 21.5% were referred between one and three years ago, and the remainder (16.8%) had been referred during the previous 12 months.

Multiple investigations could be used in diagnosing CHF. Chest x-ray had been used in diagnosing CHF in 71.9% of cases, ECHO had been used in 74.6% of cases and ECG in 65.8% of cases. GPs had ordered 60.8% of chest x-rays, 25.3% of ECHOs and 56.7% of ECGs, with cardiac specialists ordering the rest.

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