

SAND abstract No. 5 from the BEACH program 1999–2000

Subject: Depression

Organisation supporting this study: Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care (Pharmaceutical Branch).

Issues: The point prevalence of depression in general practice patients, the types of depression and methods of management by GPs.

Sample: 8,333 encounters for 309 GPs; data collection periods: 13/7/99 – 17/8/99, 26/10/99 – 30/11/99, 22/2/2000 – 27/3/2000.

Method: Detailed in the paper entitled 'SAND Method' on this website (<http://www.fmrc.org.au/beach.htm>). 'Major depressive disorder' was defined according to DSM-IV criteria to provide guidance for general practitioners reporting this condition.

Summary of results

The age–sex distribution of the respondents was similar to the expected distribution for general practice in BEACH, with the majority (59.4%) of patients being female.

The prevalence of depression among the respondents was 14.4% (95% CI: 13.1–15.7). The prevalence of depression for females (16.2%, 95% CI: 14.7–17.7) was significantly higher than for males (11.8%, 95% CI: 9.6–14.0). The highest prevalence rate of depressive disorder was among patients aged 45–64 year (20.3%, 95% CI: 18.4–22.4).

For nearly half (44.0%) of the patients reported by the GP as having depression, the GP classified the depression as a major depressive disorder. This represents a prevalence of major depression of 6.4% for the total sample. Prevalence of major depression among females was 7.1 percent, (95% CI: 6.0–8.3) and males 5.3 percent (95% CI: 3.2–7.4), indicating that there was less difference between males and females in prevalence rates of major depression compared with rates of depression overall.

Of all those with depression, 61% were receiving medication (with or without counselling), 25% were receiving counselling only, and 7% were receiving no treatment. Of those with major depression 85% were receiving medication and 2% were receiving no treatment.

89% of medications taken for depression were antidepressants. The most common medication (generic) reported was sertraline, which accounted for 19.1% of medications for depression and 21.4% of medications for major depression. Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors was the most common subgroup of antidepressants recorded, accounting for 49% of medications.

For those respondents who were currently taking antidepressant medication, a GP had initiated the course of medication in the majority of cases (72.9%).

Counselling was provided by a GP in 48.5% of cases where the respondents were reported to have depression.

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