SAND abstract No. 9 from the BEACH program 1999–2000

Subject: Influenza and absenteeism

Organisations supporting this study: Roche Products

Issues: Prevalence (previous 12 months), days of absence from work/study, days off advised, hospitalisation, medical certificate given at consultation.

Sample: 4,228 encounters from 106 GPs, data collection period: 4/5/99 – 7/6/99


Summary of results

The age–sex distribution of the respondents was similar to the expected distribution for general practice, with the majority (56.9%) of patients being female.

The prevalence of influenza in the previous 12 months among the respondents was 14.9% (95% CI: 11.2–18.6). The highest prevalence was found among patients aged 15 to 24 years (22.3%, 95% CI: 16.9–27.7), there was no difference between males and females in the prevalence of influenza.

One in five (19.8%, 95% CI: 15.1–24.4) patients who were working/studying reported having had influenza in the previous 12 months. Forty four percent of these patients reported having three or more days absent from work, 33% reported having less than three days absent, and 23% had not had any days absent.

Only 1.6% (95% CI: 0.0–11.8) of patients in work/study had been hospitalised due to influenza in the previous 12 months. In comparison, 3.5% (95% CI: 0.0–9.9) of all patients (irrespective of employment status) had been hospitalised.

For 53 of the patients, influenza was a problem being managed at the current encounter. On average the patient had already had one day absent for influenza when seen by the GP and the GP advised a further 1.6 days off at the consultation. Thus the average number of days taken off work/study for influenza was 2.6 days.

A medical certificate was given at 7.8% (95% CI: 5.8–9.8) of the encounters in this sub-sample of encounters. Among those for whom influenza was managed at the encounter, 52.8% (95% CI: 40.2–65.4) were issued a medical certificate.

Correspondence to: Ying Pan, GPSCU