



Better Evaluation and Care of Health (BEACH) is a continuous, national survey of general practice activity in Australia in which 1000 GPs per year take part. It commenced in 1998.

Lipid disorders in Australian general practice

Prescription rates for lipid lowering medications are continuing to grow

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The National Heart Foundation recently recommended a target LDL-C of <2.0 mmol/L for patients with vascular disease, diabetes, kidney disease, familial hypercholesterolaemia and other people at risk of cardiovascular disease. The proposed management methods were lifestyle interventions including dietary modification for all, and lipid modifying therapy for those at risk.¹ At the same time, an international meta-analysis of 14 HMG-CoA reductase inhibitors (statins) trials involving 90 000 individuals found a 19 percent reduction in coronary mortality and 21 percent reduction in any major vascular event per mmol/L reduction in LDL cholesterol.² BEACH results reflect the international trend of using statins to reduce adverse cardiovascular events in high risk patients.³

The BEACH year runs from April to March. In the 2004–05 BEACH year, lipid disorder was the fifth most common problem managed in general practice, recorded at a rate of 3.3 per 100 encounters. This was a significant increase on the 1998–99 rate of 2.5 per 100 encounters. After adjustment for differences in the number of GP encounters per year, there were an estimated 666 000 more lipid problems managed in general practice in 2004–05 than in 1998–99.

The rate of statin prescribing also increased, from 1.9 medications per 100 encounters in 1998–99 to 3.3 per 100 encounters in 2004–05. After adjustment for differences in the number of GP encounters per year there were an estimated 900 000 more prescriptions for statin medications provided by GPs in 2004–05 than in 1998–99. The increase in lipid medications was explained by the increase in the management rate of lipid disorders as there was no change in the rate of statins per 100 lipid problems managed. Since 1998–99 statins have been prescribed at about 61 medications per 100 lipid problems. Almost 70 percent of statins were prescribed for lipid disorders, about 10 percent were recorded under the problem 'prescription', seven percent were prescribed for ischaemic heart disease, five percent for hypertension and three percent for diabetes.

A BEACH substudy among general practice patients found that of 10 233 patients, 1302 (12.7%) were currently using lipid lowering medications. The patients were more likely to be aged 65 years and over and were more likely to be male than female. At the start of lipid lowering therapy, almost half of these patients had existing

cardiovascular disease, over one third were overweight or obese, one third had a family history of heart disease and one quarter had diabetes.

The management rate of lipid disorders continues to increase, suggesting a rising prevalence of diagnosed hypercholesterolaemia in the Australian population. This increase is accompanied by a continued growth in prescriptions for lipid lowering medications, specifically the statins. ♦

1. National Heart Foundation of Australia, Position statement on lipid management, 2005. Available at: www.heartfoundation.com.au. [Accessed July 2006].
2. Baigent C, Keech A, Kearney PM et al. Efficacy and safety of cholesterol-lowering treatment: prospective meta-analysis of data from 90,056 participants in 14 randomised trials of statins. *Lancet*. 2005 Oct 8; 366(9493):1267–78. Epub 2005 Sep 27.
3. Britt H, Miller GC, Knox S et al. General practice activity in Australia 2004–05. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare; 2005. AIHW Cat. No. GEP 18. (General Practice Series No. 18).

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