



Bettering the Evaluation and Care of Health (BEACH) is a continuous, national survey of general practice activity in Australia in which ever changing random samples of about 1000 GPs per year take part. It commenced in 1998.

Osteoporosis: not just a problem for women

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In July and August 2007 we conducted a BEACH substudy* on osteoporosis among general practice patients based on 2613 patients of all ages from 89 general practitioners. We also compared results with a similar study we conducted in 2000.

Facts and figures

According to the International Osteoporosis Foundation:¹

- one in three women and one in five men aged over 50 years will experience osteoporotic fractures
- one quarter of hip fractures in people over 50 occur in men
- lifetime risk of fracture for men is 30%, similar to the risk of developing prostate cancer
- hip fractures in men result in 31% mortality rate at one year, almost double the rate for women
- risk factors include family or personal history of nontraumatic fracture, early menopause, physical inactivity, smoking, high alcohol intake and prolonged use of corticosteroids, proton pump inhibitors or anticonvulsants. A prior fracture is associated with an 86% increased risk of any fracture
- in Australia, 11% of men and 27% of women aged 60 years or more are osteoporotic; the burden of increased morbidity and mortality from fragility fractures costs \$7 billion annually.

Results from BEACH

Risk factors and history of fracture

Twenty-three percent of respondents had at least one risk factor for osteoporosis, and 8% had suffered a fracture after minor trauma. Altogether, 617 patients (24% of respondents) had at least one of the risk factors, and/or had had a fracture after minor trauma. Sixteen percent of male patients and 29% of female patients had risk factor/fracture. As expected, the proportion of patients with risk factor/fracture increased with age: 11% of patients aged 25–44, 30% of patients aged 45–64, 40% of patients aged 65–74 and 53% of patients aged 75 or more.

Screening for osteoporosis

Just over half of the 617 patients with risk factor/fracture had been referred for screening, mainly for a bone mineral density (BMD) scan. A significantly higher proportion of female patients were referred for testing compared with male patients: of 446 female patients, 59% had been tested, while among 163 male patients, 31% had been tested.

Diagnosis of osteoporosis

Of 312 tested respondents, 52% were diagnosed with osteoporosis, and over half of these were aged 75 years or more. There was no significant difference between screened male and female patients in the proportion diagnosed with osteoporosis.

Exploring previously unpublished data on the diagnosis of men and women with osteoporosis

Comparison over time

A significantly higher proportion of patients with risk factor/fracture were screened for osteoporosis in 2007 than in 2000. In 2000, 16% of men were tested and 38% of those were diagnosed with osteoporosis, while in 2007 the proportion of men tested doubled to 31%, and 57% were diagnosed. In 2000, 48% of women were tested, and in 2007 60% were tested, but the proportion diagnosed (51–52%) remained the same.

Conclusion

Osteoporosis rates will increase as the population ages. Our study shows that Australian GPs have become more aware of the need to test at-risk men as well as women. Bone mineral density results showed that an osteoporosis diagnosis is just as likely to be made for male patients as for female patients tested. This demonstrates that GPs are choosing appropriately, if perhaps conservatively, when they refer men for testing.

It would be interesting to see what proportion of men would be diagnosed if those with risk factors were tested as often as women. Now that Medicare covers BMD tests for all patients over 70, we may see higher test rates for men and women leading to improved diagnosis prior to fracture. ♦

1. International Osteoporosis Foundation. Facts and statistics about osteoporosis and its impact. Available at www.iofbonehealth.org/facts-and-statistics.html [Accessed 11 January 2008].

Erratum

An error was made in the 'Posttraumatic stress disorder among Australian veterans' article published in *GPreview* Vol 11, No 3. The pullout quote should have read "High management rates of posttraumatic stress disorder were found among male veterans aged 45 to 64 years".

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