



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.

Generation Y visits to the GP

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BEACH data show fewer GP visits among young men, high rates of counselling and advice for Generation Y patients, and a high proportion of hazardous drinkers

Generation Y refers to the generation that came after Generation X, but the group is rather loosely defined in terms of date of birth. For this study we chose people born between 1981 and 1996 – patients aged 10–27 years – and we examined 37 009 BEACH general practice encounters from the past three years to find out why Generation Y patients attend general practice and the problems for which they are managed.

We already know that young males are less likely to see their GP.¹ This was well illustrated in these results, which showed that only 38% of patients were male (compared with 44% in total BEACH data). In 2005, 88% of the Australian population visited a GP at least once, compared with only 70% of young males aged 15–24 years. Young males on average see a GP two and a half times per year, whereas among the total population the figure is five times per year (Medicare data).

The most common reason Generation Y patients gave for visiting the doctor was a throat symptom/complaint, followed in frequency order by cough and immunisation/vaccination. These reasons were given at a much higher rate by Generation Y than by total patients in BEACH. Other frequently recorded reasons were rash, oral contraception and abdominal pain.

Generation Y had a higher management rate of respiratory, skin, general problems (including immunisation) and pregnancy/family planning, and a much lower rate of musculoskeletal, psychological, cardiovascular and endocrine/metabolic problems managed compared with total BEACH encounters.

Acute upper respiratory tract infection, immunisation and oral contraception headed the list of individual problems managed at Generation Y encounters. Depression was the fourth most common problem, with a management rate of 3.4 per 100 encounters, similar to the rate in total BEACH.

Medications were prescribed significantly less often at encounters with Generation Y than at total encounters, in keeping with the low rates of chronic problems managed for this group. Medications most frequently prescribed were penicillins, cephalosporins and other antibiotics, as well as contraceptives, topical steroids and antidepressants. Counselling, advice and education were used more often than average by the GP to treat the problems of these young patients.

The lifestyle choices of Generation Y have been the subject of media attention, prompting us to examine the smoking and alcohol consumption habits of the older members of the group. For ethical reasons we collect these data only for patients aged 18 years and over.

Forty-four percent of patients aged 18–27 years had a history of smoking (12% reported they were previous smokers). We found a higher percentage of young male patients (47%) had a history of smoking tobacco than female patients (42%), and were significantly more likely to be daily smokers (26% of males and 21% of females).

Eighty percent of Generation Y patients drank alcohol (comparable to all general practice patients) but half of these (41%) were hazardous drinkers, a much higher proportion than average (27%). Male Generation Y patients were much more likely to be in the hazardous drinking category (49%) than their female counterparts (37%). ♦

The lifestyle choices of Generation Y have been the subject of media attention, prompting us to examine smoking and alcohol consumption in this group

1. Bayram C, Britt H, Kelly Z, Valenti L. 2003. Male consultations in general practice in Australia 1999–00. AIHW Cat. No. GEP 11. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare