

A decade of general practice

New BEACH report details a decade of GP activity

The Rudd Government has welcomed the publication of the new BEACH report, *General practice in Australia, health priorities and policies 1998 to 2008*, with Federal Health Minister Nicola Roxon saying it underlines the important role general practitioners play in Australia's primary care system.

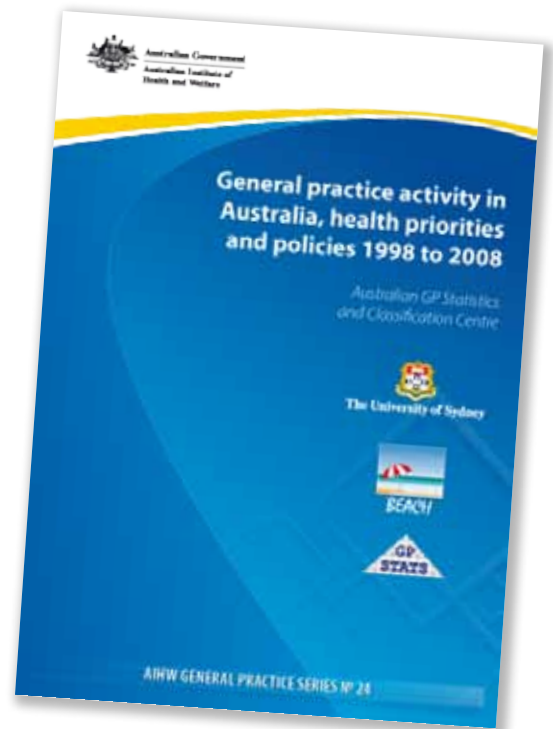
The report, prepared by the University of Sydney's Australian GP Statistics and Classification Centre (AGPSCC), a collaborating unit of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, is based on an analysis of 10 years of data collected through the Bettering the Evaluation and Care of Health (BEACH) study of general practice activity.

Looking at the decade between 1998 and 2008, the report shows that GPs are spending an increasing amount of time with older patients, are managing more chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, and are referring patients with diabetes to allied health professionals more often. They are also managing depression more frequently and referring a greater number of these patients to psychologists.

The AGPSCC's Professor Helena Britt, a co-editor of the report, says the report shows how "the issues that patients bring to the doctor have both changed and become more complex over time." She says it also outlines how general practice has improved the health of Australians.

"The way general practice has changed over the last decade has brought some positive outcomes, including increased detection and management of type 2 diabetes, more involvement in detecting and managing cancers and other chronic disorders."

Each year about 1000 randomly selected GPs participate in the BEACH study. Their participation, Professor Britt says, "makes it possible to get information like this out to the community. Without the GP's efforts we would know little about the important role GPs play in the health care of the Australian population." ♦



Australians and their GPs

- GPs are spending an increasing proportion of their time with older patients and less time with children
- Most GPs are in group practices
- The average GP is working fewer hours than they did in 1998
- Visits to GPs fell from a peak of 5.5 visits per head of population in 1998 to a low of 4.9 in 2003–2004, before rising again to 5.2 in 2007–2008

For more on the BEACH report, see this edition's bytes from BEACH on page 10.