



# Encounters with older patients in Australian general practice

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The BEACH program is a continuous national study of general practice activity in Australia. The content of encounters with patients aged 65 years and over was examined to identify the morbidities and management of older people in general practice in Australia.<sup>1</sup> This provides a backdrop against which the theme articles in this issue of *Australian Family Physician* can be further considered.

Of the 1982 general practitioners who participated in BEACH between 2000 and 2002, 1963 (99.0%) recorded encounters with patients aged 65 years and over. Almost 60% of older patients were women. Patients aged 65–74 years accounted for 48.3% of patients, while 51.7% were over 75 years of age (Figure 1).

Reasons for encounter were recorded at a rate of 161.7 per 100 encounters. The most

common reasons for encounter for older patients were requests for prescriptions (16.8 per 100), and cardiac check ups (11.9 per 100). Problems were managed at a rate of 171.2 per 100 encounters. The most frequently managed problems were hypertension (19.9 per 100), osteoarthritis (6.2 per 100) and immunisations/vaccinations (6.2 per 100).

Prescriptions were given to older patients at a rate of 119.2 per 100 encounters. The med-

ications most frequently prescribed were anti-hypertensives (17.0 per 100), NSAIDs (6.7 per 100), and simple analgesics (6.7 per 100).

Clinical treatments were provided at a rate of 30.8 per 100 encounters. The most frequent type of clinical treatment was counselling for nutrition/weight (5.1 per 100). Procedural treatments were provided at a rate of 15.9 per 100 encounters. Excisions, tissue removal and biopsies were the most frequently recorded procedures at a rate of 3.6 per 100 encounters.

Referrals were provided at a rate of 12.1 per 100 encounters. Referrals to specialists accounted for the majority of these (8.1 per 100). Ophthalmologists were the specialists to whom patients were most often referred (1.3 per 100). Referrals to allied health professionals were made at a rate of 2.7 per 100 encounters, of which the majority were to physiotherapists (0.9 per 100). Pathology tests were ordered at a rate of 33.5 per 100 encounters, full blood counts being the most common (4.7 per 100). Imaging tests were ordered at a rate of 8.1 per 100 encounters, chest X-rays being most common (1.4 per 100).

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## Reference

- O'Halloran J, Britt H, Valenti L, Harrison C, Pan Y, Knox S. Older patients attending general practice in Australia 2000–2002. AIHW Cat. No. GEP 12. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and

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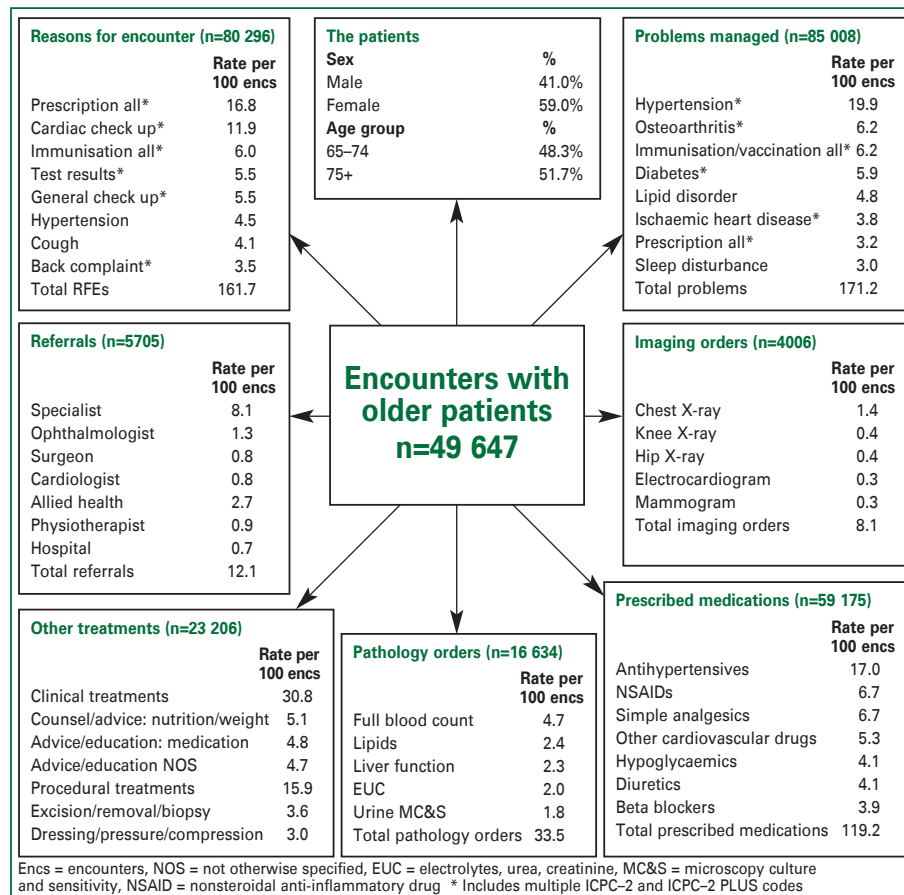


Figure 1. Content of encounters with patients aged 65 years and over

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