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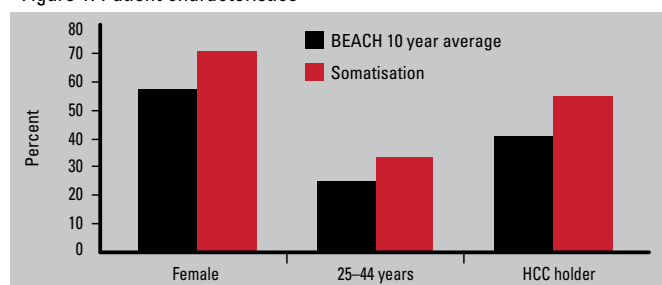


Somatisation

Somatisation is when physical symptoms develop through stress or emotional problems. Each year in the BEACH program (Bettering the Evaluation and Care of Health), somatisation disorder is managed about 30 times in 100 000 encounters. Although it is rare for general practitioners to identify the problem managed as somatisation, over the 10 years of BEACH we now have 298 encounters where this occurred, and details of these encounters are shown below.

■ **Female patients were significantly more likely to present at somatisation encounters (4 per 10 000 encounters) than were males (2 per 10 000). Female patients were therefore significantly over represented at somatisation encounters (70.5%) compared with total BEACH encounters (57.1%), as were health care card holders and patients aged 25–44 years (Figure 1).**

Figure 1. Patient characteristics



The most common reasons for encounters given by patients at these encounters were throat symptom/complaint, pregnancy, chest pain and anxiety. Other problems commonly managed together with somatisation were anxiety, hypertension, depression and oesophageal disease.

The 298 somatisation problems managed are broken down into more specific diagnoses in *Table 1*, together with the treatments provided. Management of somatisation included higher levels of clinical treatments (counselling) but lower rates of medication than the BEACH average. Referral rates were significantly higher than average and most of these were to ear, nose and throat specialists and psychiatrists. Pathology test order rates were low and imaging tests were ordered at average rates.

Conflict of interest: none declared.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank the GP participants in the BEACH program and all members of the BEACH team. Financial contributors to BEACH between 1998 and 2008: Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare; National Prescribing Service; AstraZeneca Pty Ltd (Australia); Janssen-Cilag Pty Ltd; Merck, Sharp and Dohme (Australia) Pty Ltd; Pfizer Australia; Abbott Australasia; Sanofi-Aventis Australia Pty Ltd; Aventis Pharma Pty Ltd; Roche Products Pty Ltd; National Occupational Health and Safety Commission; Australian Government Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Table 1. Somatisation and its management

Problem label	Percent of somatisation problems (n=298)	
Somatisation disorder	25.2	
Globus hystericus	24.2	
Hypochondriasis	14.8	
False pregnancy	10.7	
Dissociative disorder	8.7	
Conversion disorder	4.0	
Cardiac neurosis	4.0	
Hysteria	3.7	
Psychogenic pain	3.7	
Management	Rate per 100 somatisation problems	Rate per 100 problems BEACH 2006–2007 (n=136 333)
Medications all	25.5	68.4
Other treatments	56.0	30.1
– clinical treatments	50.7	20.0
Referrals	13.4	8.2
Pathology tests	21.1	28.6
Imaging tests	6.7	6.0