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Osteoarthritis

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From April 2009 to March 2010 in the BEACH (Bettering the Evaluation and Care of Health) program, osteoarthritis was managed in general practice at a rate of 2.9 per 100 encounters, about 3.4 million times per year nationally.

For more than half of the osteoarthritis recorded (55%), the site was not specified. Of the sites specified, osteoarthritis of the knee was the most common, accounting for 21%. Osteoarthritis of the spine and of the hip accounted for 13% and 7% respectively. There was no difference in management rates between male and female patients, but as would be expected, rates rose through the age groups, from 0.6 per 100 encounters with patients aged 25–44 years to 6.1 for those aged 65 years and older.

The management of osteoarthritis differed significantly from average management of all problems at BEACH encounters. Osteoarthritis was less likely than average to be a new problem for the patient, and was less likely to be managed with advice/counselling or with a pathology test order.

On the other hand, prescribed medications were high (74 per 100 osteoarthritis contacts) as were referrals (11 per 100 contacts). Imaging tests were ordered at 16 per 100 osteoarthritis contacts, as compared with the usual rate of six per 100 total problems managed in BEACH (Figure 1).

Medications prescribed

Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) were prescribed at a rate of 28 per 100 osteoarthritis problems managed, while other analgesics/antipyretics were prescribed at a rate of 22, and opioids at a rate of 20 per 100 osteoarthritis problems. The most common individual medication prescribed was paracetamol, which accounted for almost 1 in 3 of these medications (Table 1).

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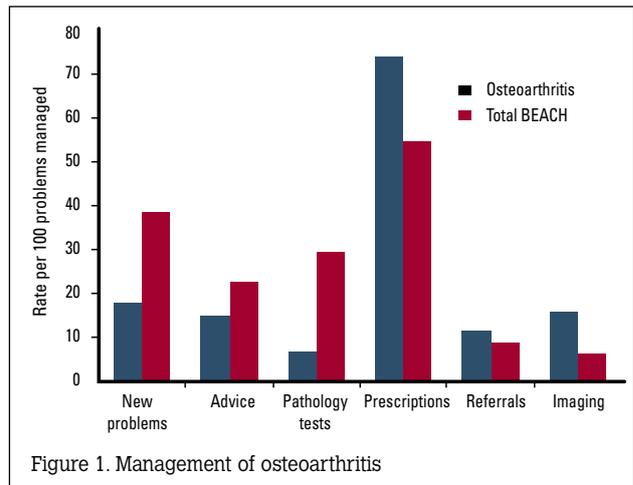


Figure 1. Management of osteoarthritis

Prescribed medications (n=2177)	Rate per 100 osteoarthritis problems (n=2935)	Percent of medications prescribed for osteoarthritis
Paracetamol	22.0	29.8
Meloxicam	10.8	14.6
Celecoxib	7.7	10.5
Tramadol	5.1	6.9
Paracetamol/codeine	5.0	6.8
Buprenorphine	3.7	5.0
Diclofenac systemic	3.7	5.0
Oxycodone	3.3	4.5

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