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GPs in teaching practices

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From April 2010 to March 2011, 956 general practitioners took part in BEACH (Bettering the Evaluation and Care of Health). Five hundred and ninety-four (62%) worked in a teaching practice for undergraduates, junior doctors or general practice registrars.

This article is a descriptive comparison of recognised GPs who work in teaching practices with those who work in nonteaching practices. We look at GP and practice characteristics and at some characteristics of the patients attending these practices and the treatments provided by the GPs. All differences reported here are statistically significant.

The GPs

Compared with GPs at nonteaching practices, GPs working at teaching practices were younger and more likely to hold Fellowship of The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (FRACGP). They were more likely to have graduated in Australia than overseas, and less likely to conduct more than half their consultations in a language other than English.

Their practices

Size of practice differed markedly between the two groups: teaching practices tended to be larger, with three-quarters having five or more GPs working at them. The majority of nonteaching practices were small. Location of practice also differed, with a much greater proportion of teaching practices located in regional areas and a smaller proportion in capital cities compared with nonteaching practices. Teaching practices were much more likely to be accredited than nonteaching practices (Figure 1).

The patients and treatments

Compared with patients seen at nonteaching practices, those seen by GPs at teaching practices were less often aged 15–44 years and more often aged 75 years or older. They were less likely to be from a non-English speaking background, more likely to be indigenous, and more likely to live in regional areas rather than capital cities. Encounters with GPs at teaching practices were less likely to involve at least one medication but more likely to involve at least one pathology test than encounters with GPs in nonteaching practices (Figure 2).

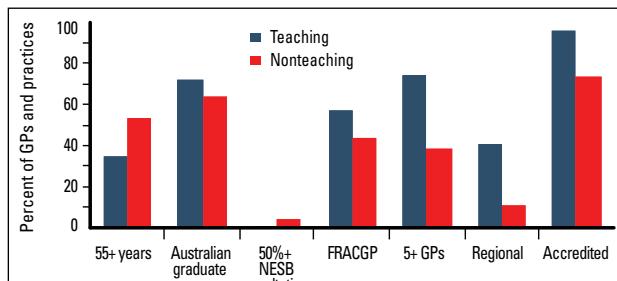


Figure 1. GP and practice characteristics

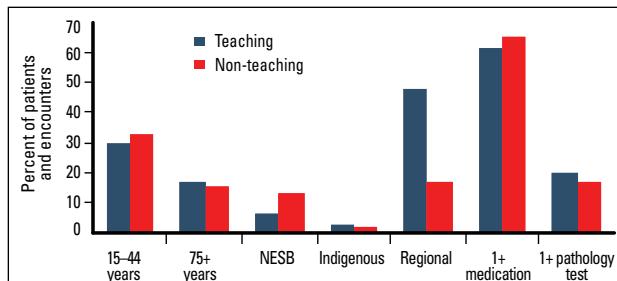


Figure 2. Patient characteristics and treatments

In 2004 we published a similar analysis using data from 2002–2003,¹ although it did not include patient and treatment information. Previously we found a higher proportion of female GPs working at teaching practices, but that was no longer evident. All other differences between the two groups had not changed. However, between the two periods the proportion of practices undertaking teaching rose from 48% to 62%.

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