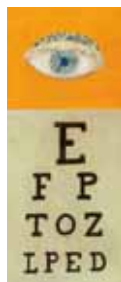


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Glaucoma

Between April 2007 and March 2009, glaucoma was managed by general practitioners at a rate of 1.8 contacts per 1000 encounters in the BEACH (Bettering the Evaluation and Care of Health) program, extrapolating to about 200 000 times per year nationally. This was marginally higher than in April 2000 to March 2002 (1.4 per 1000). We compared results from the two data periods to establish what changes had occurred.

Figure 1. Patient characteristics and common management of glaucoma

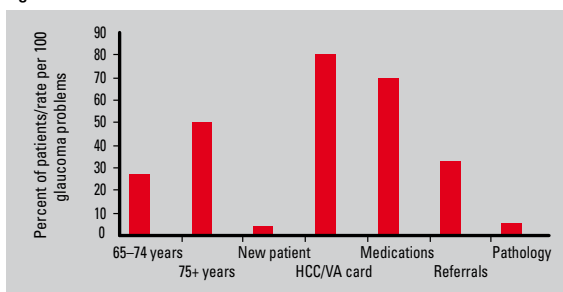


Table 1. Changes in medications prescribed for glaucoma

ATC medication group	Percent of medications	
	2000–2002	2007–2009
Beta blocking agents	43.0 (37.1–48.9)	32.8 (27.1–38.4)
Prostaglandin analogues	30.4 (24.8–35.9)	48.4 (42.6–54.1)
Parasympathomimetics	8.4 (4.7–12.1)	1.6 (0.1–3.2)

■ **Between the two data periods, characteristics of patients managed for glaucoma did not differ in terms of age, gender, health care card status, or status to the practice. In 2007–2009: 22% of glaucoma patients were <65 years of age, 28% were 65–74 years and 50% were 75+ years of age. Management rates of glaucoma increased significantly between the 65–74 years age group (3.8 per 1000 encounters) and the 75+ age group (6.0 per 1000). Eighty**

percent of glaucoma patients held a Commonwealth health care card or Department of Veterans’ Affairs card and very few (4.0%) were new patients to the practice.

There were no significant changes in overall methods of management of glaucoma between the two data periods. In 2007–2009, general practitioners prescribed 70 medications per 100 glaucoma problems managed, made 33 referrals per 100 (31 being to specialists), and ordered very few pathology tests (Figure 1).

However, the types of medications prescribed changed significantly between 2000–2002 and 2007–2009. Prostaglandin analogues (eg. latanoprost) have superseded older medications (eg. pilocarpine, a parasympathomimetic and plain timolol, a beta blocking eye drop). Table 1 shows changes in medication type, but note that the World Health Organization Anatomical Therapeutic Classification¹ index includes new eye drop combinations containing beta blocking agents in the beta blocker group. These combinations made up more than 40% of beta blocking agents in 2007–2009, and thus masked the decrease in the prescription of beta blockers as a single substance.

Glaucoma represents a range of high intraocular pressure conditions. International recommendations for current treatment include a shift from beta blockers to prostaglandin derivatives as the first line drug class of choice.² BEACH results show that Australian GPs’ prescribing patterns follow latest guidelines based on scientific evidence.

Conflict of interest: none declared.

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