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# COPD

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From April 2008 to March 2009 in BEACH (Bettering the Evaluation and Care of Health) data, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) was managed by general practitioners at a rate of 8 per 1000 encounters, which suggests it is managed about 923 000 times per year nationally. The prevalence of COPD in the population attending general practice is 2.6%.<sup>1</sup>

The BEACH data confirmed that patients managed for COPD were significantly more likely than average to be male. Male patients were managed for COPD at a rate of 10 per 1000 encounters, significantly higher than the rate for females (7 per 1000). They were also more likely to be older than the average general practice patient; three-quarters of COPD patients were aged 65 years or more. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease was managed at a rate of 21 per 1000 encounters with patients in that age group (Figure 1).

Consultations with COPD patients took place less often than usual in the surgery. As would be expected with these older patients, consultations at residential aged care facilities (RACF) or the patient's home were recorded at four times the BEACH average (Figure 1).

## Management of COPD

There were 116 medications prescribed, advised or supplied for every 100 COPD problems managed (Table 1). The most common were inhaled tiotropium, which accounted for more than one-quarter of these medications, salbutamol (one in 5) and fluticasone/salmeterol. Prednisolone was less common.

Clinical treatments and procedures provided by the GP for COPD were recorded at a significantly lower than average rate (25 per 100 COPD problems compared with 33 per 100 total problems managed). Counselling or advice about smoking accounted for one-quarter of the clinical treatments, and the performing of respiratory function tests accounted for more than half of the procedures.

Referrals were given at a rate of 6 per 100 COPD problems which was significantly lower than average. The majority of referrals were to respiratory physicians. Imaging tests were ordered at the usual rate, with the most common being chest X-rays. The ordering of pathology tests was rare for COPD with only five recorded per 100 COPD problems managed. The pathology test ordered most frequently was full blood count.

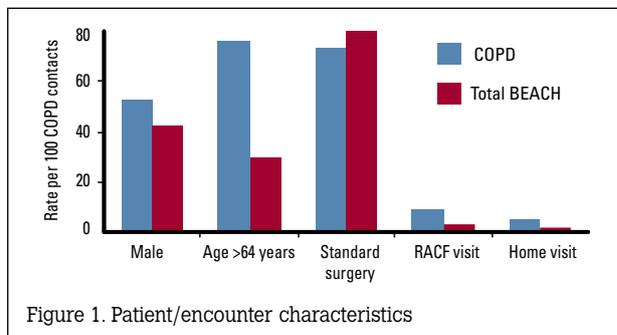


Figure 1. Patient/encounter characteristics

**Table 1. Management of COPD**

Management type	Rate per 100 COPD problems managed (n=790)
Medications (n=915)	116.0
Tiotropium	26.1
Salbutamol	19.1
Fluticasone/salmeterol	16.8
Prednisolone	8.0
Budesonide/efometerol	5.8
Other treatments/procedures (n=199)	25.2
Respiratory function test	4.6
Advice smoking	4.1
Referrals (n=48)	6.1
Respiratory physician	3.3
Tests ordered (n=96)	12.2
Chest X-ray	5.6

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