
141. The National Census of Medicines Use: Medicine Use by Australians Aged 50 Years and Older

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Introduction

Medicines are the most common form of treatment, yet we know very little about what conventional and complementary medicines (CMs) are taken by Australians, and in what combinations they are used.

Objectives

To investigate the prevalence and types of medicines used by people aged 50 and over.

Methods

A piloted self-completed questionnaire was mailed to 4500 Australians aged 50 years and older using state/territory stratified electoral roll random samples. Four waves of postings occurred between June 2009 and February 2010, to account for seasonal variation. The structured questionnaires consisted of a one-day medicines diary, a record of medicines taken in the last month, reasons for use, and who prescribed/recommended the medicine.

Preliminary Results

To date 558 questionnaires have been returned and analysed (response rate 38%). Half the respondents were aged 50-65 years. Overall, 90% of respondents had used at least one medicine in the period of the 24-hour diary and 93% had done so in the past month. The average number of medicines used in the past 24-hours was 4.7, with a range of 0-26. Twenty-nine percent used more than five medicines on a regular basis; 45% used only conventional medicines, 45% used CMs in conjunction with conventional medicines and 3% used only CMs.

Antihypertensives and simple analgesics/antipyretics were the most commonly used classes of conventional medicines. The most common conventional medicines were paracetamol, aspirin, and atorvastatin. Fish oils and glucosamine hydrochloride were the most common CMs. Doctors recommended 81% of conventional medicines, whereas CMs were recommended by doctors in 32% of cases and through the media in 17%.

Discussion

Use of medicines is an everyday activity for older Australians. Many participants used many medicines daily, often combining conventional and complementary medicines. This raises many issues, such as potential for interactions and side-effects, as well as effectiveness and costs.
