Aspects of Medical Service Usage in South Australia

In September 2001, a SERCIS population health survey assessing aspects of medical service usage was conducted in South Australia. The survey obtained information relating to the use of after hours medical services and the reasons for using this type of service.

METHODS

In all, 3000 adults (18 years and over) in South Australia were interviewed and the overall response rate was 75.2%. The interviews were conducted by telephone using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing technology.

RESULTS

Prevalence of having a “usual” general practitioner

- Overall 84.8% of respondents had a “usual” general practitioner (GP).
- Respondents who had a general practitioner were more likely to:
  - be aged 55 years and over;
  - be female;
  - be separated, divorced or widowed;
  - live in Southern Adelaide;
  - undertake home duties, be retired or a student;
  - speak a language other than English at home and;
  - earn a gross annual household income of less than $20,000.

Medical services utilised after business hours

- Respondents (n=3000) were asked what they would initially seek to do, if they felt they needed to see a doctor out of business hours (including weekends) for a service they would normally seek from their, or a, GP.
- The most common responses are summarised in Figure 1.

Respondents who would see or ring their usual GP

- Respondents who would initially see or ring their usual general practitioner anyway were more likely to be 65 years and over, live in the metropolitan area (particularly western or eastern Adelaide), have no children, be separated, divorced or widowed, come from an English speaking country other than Australia, have a gross annual household income up to $20,000, and be either a student, home maker or retired.

Respondents who would attend a hospital emergency department

- Respondents who would attend a hospital emergency department were more likely to be to live in country SA, to be renting their dwelling from the Housing Trust and have a gross annual household income of less than $20,000.

Respondents who would attend an after hours clinic

- Respondents who attended an after hours GP clinic were more likely to be never married, live in metropolitan Adelaide (the southern or eastern regions), and have a gross annual household income of $60,000 or more.

- Metropolitan and country respondents were examined to determine whether a difference in after hour medical service use between the two areas existed. Figure 2 shows the metropolitan and country responses for the three highest categories.
Reasons why a particular after hours service would be chosen

- The main reason as to why each type of after hours service would be chosen was determined.
- The responses of metropolitan and country residents to the top three categories are shown in Figure 3.

Association between type of after hours service used and reasons why service was chosen

- Respondents who would see or ring their general practitioner, 35.4% were confident that the service could meet their needs.
- Respondents who would attend an after hours clinic, 58.6% stated that it was the closest / most convenient service.
- Respondents who would attend an emergency clinic department, 38.8% stated that it was the first service that came to mind.

Association between service and circumstance

- If the need was urgent, respondents would go to a hospital emergency department (34.8%), or contact their local general practitioner anyway (33.2%).
- If the respondents were uncomfortable but the need was not urgent, they would see or ring their general practitioner (40.5%).
- If uncertain of need, respondents would attend an after hours clinic (33.5%) or a hospital emergency department (32.3%).

INFORMATION

For further information about the results from the survey please visit the web site at: http://www.dh.sa.gov.au/pehs/cpse/sercis-publications.html or contact Tiffany Gill on 08 8226 0739 or email tiffany.gill@health.sa.gov.au