

Actual use of asthma medications contradicts guidelines

A study has found only 16% of the 352,082 Australians who filled a prescription for asthma preventer medications for the first time during the period July 2004 to June 2005, went on to use them regularly.

Most (61%) 'first time' users did not fill another prescription in the next two years while 22% did so sporadically.

The research will be presented at the Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand (TSANZ) Conference which starts this Sunday in Melbourne.

The study was conducted by the Australian Centre for Asthma Monitoring, a collaborating unit of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare based at the Woolcock Institute of Medical Research in Sydney. It analysed the anonymous Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) records of individuals who filled a prescription for preventer medications for asthma for the first time between July 2004 and June 2005, and their subsequent prescription activity over a period of two years. The most commonly used form of preventer medication is inhaled corticosteroids.

Professor Guy Marks, Head of Epidemiology Research at the Woolcock Institute, said the results indicated that the prevalence of one-time and sporadic use was highest in young adults (age 15-34 years) with regular use most common in adults aged 65 years and over.

"The PBS dataset is a valuable tool for assessing patterns of asthma medication use," he said.

"Importantly this study shows that while guidelines recommend regular use of preventer medication, this certainly isn't happening in the community. At least some of those people who are now using preventer medication sporadically, could be expected to benefit from regular use of this class of medications.

Source: Research Australia

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