

THE NATIONAL CONTINENCE HELPLINE- A ONE YEAR SNAPSHOT, JULY 2002 – JUNE 2003.

Hypothesis / aims of study

To evaluate all calls to the National Continence Helpline, part of the National Continence Management Strategy, over a one year period.

Study design, materials and methods

All calls in the snapshot year (July 2002 to June 2003) were evaluated. Call data was collected using IBM Lotus Notes. Data was imported into Microsoft Access 7.0 for analysis.

Results

There were 15,023 calls to the Helpline in the year analysed. Overall call duration varied, averaging 6.72 minutes. The shortest call was for 1 minute and the longest call was for 90 minutes. Call numbers varied from month to month. October was the busiest month, followed by August. Calls were received from all states and territories and from metropolitan, rural and remote areas of Australia. State of origin of callers varied. Victoria had the highest number of callers with 3085 (34%) calls, followed by New South Wales with 2748 (31%) calls, Queensland with 1515 (17%) calls, South Australia with 777 (9%) calls, Western Australia with 453 (5%) calls, Australian Capital Territory with 60 (2%) calls, Tasmania with 196 (2%) calls and the Northern Territory with 39 (<1%) calls. 10,666 (71%) callers were female and 4357 (29%) callers were male. 6747 (44%) callers were clients, 4892 (33%) were classified as professionals and 3384 (23%) were classified as carers. Continence issue was noted. 7245 (48%) callers rang regarding urinary incontinence alone, 602 (4%) regarding faecal incontinence alone, 607 (4%) called regarding both urinary and faecal incontinence and 1447 (10%) about continence aids and appliances. In 5122 (34%) calls a designated continence issue was not noted.

The most common reason for calling the Helpline was for management advice (46%). These calls took the longest time, at an average of 8 minutes, 52 seconds. The least number of calls were for financial assistance and these calls averaged 6 minutes, 56 seconds. Calls specifically requesting Helpline brochure mail-outs were dealt with quickly, averaging 4 minutes, 11 seconds. Country of birth of non-professional callers was noted. The most common country of birth was Australia with 6767 (67%) calls. Calls were also received from callers whose birth country included the United Kingdom 426 (4%), Italy 80 (<1%), India 70 (<1%), China 61 (<1%), New Zealand 55 (<1%), Germany 55 (<1%), Holland 48 (<1%), Greece 33 (<1%), Ireland 26 (<1%), Malaysia 26 (<1%), Sri Lanka 26 (<1%), South Africa 23 (<1%), and Vietnam 22 (<1%). In 2071 (20%) calls country of birth was not known.

Age of client callers varied. 239 (4%) callers were aged 0-29 years, 681 (12%) callers were aged 30-44 years, 1092 (19%) callers were aged 45-59 years, 1693 (29%) callers were aged 60-74 years and 2107 (36%) callers were 75 years of age or older. Callers aged over 60 years accounted for 65% of callers. Professional callers accounted for 4892 (33%) calls. These included Administrators 924 (19%), Nurses 2063 (42%), Allied Health Professionals 441 (9%), Students 423 (9%), Physiotherapists 413 (8%), Local Medical Officers 229 (5%), Chemists 131 (3%), Trade Professionals 81 (2%), Educators 49 (1%), Medical Specialists 37 (<1%), Government Departments 29 (<1%), and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Professionals 27 (<1%).

Calls to the National Continence Helpline resulted in the distribution of more than 1,000,000 brochures in the snapshot year. Brochures are available in English as well as 15 common community languages. The most common brochures sent was 'Pelvic Floor Exercises for Women', followed by 'Good Bladder Habits for Everyone', 'Urinary Incontinence – What is it?', 'Constipation and Incontinence', 'Nocturia' and '1 in 3 Women who have ever had a Baby Wet Themselves'.

Concluding message

Demand for the National Continence Helpline has come from all parts of Australia. Calls were received from metropolitan, rural and remote areas. Calls were received from clients, carers

and a variety of professionals. Client callers aged over 60 years were the most frequent callers to the Helpline service, however calls came from all age groups. Callers originated from a variety of birth countries and language groups and there were opportunities for Helpline brochures to be distributed in 15 different community languages. Callers asked for advice on all aspects of incontinence (both urinary and faecal) and they included clients, carers and professionals.