

# Digestive Health Network

## General Practitioner Survey 2007 REPORT

January 2008

Health Networks Branch  
Working Together to Create a Healthy WA





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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The best-practice diagnosis and management of digestive conditions in general practice was identified as a priority area by the Digestive Health Network Executive Advisory Group and the Stakeholder Workshop held in February 2007.

Members of the Digestive Executive Advisory Group also expressed some concern about the number of inappropriate referrals from general practitioners (GP) for procedural and specialist follow-up that were adding an extra burden to the public health system.

To facilitate the development of relevant GP education information covering the priority digestive conditions for general practice a GP survey was proposed.

The objectives of the survey were to:

- Obtain input from general practitioners on the priority digestive health conditions that may need additional GP education and/or information on best practice diagnosis and management.
- Obtain input on the preferred format for GP education and/or information.

This brief report provides the results of the survey.



## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

The design of this study was a single cross-sectional survey, using a self-administered mailed out questionnaire. The target population was Western Australian metropolitan and country general practitioners.

The sampling frame comprised the mailing list provided by the following Divisions of General Practice with support from the WAGP Network:

- Canning
- Fremantle
- GP Coastal
- GP Down South
- Midwest
- Osborne
- Perth & Hills
- Pilbara

Questionnaire design was formulated with reference to the specific objectives identified above. The questionnaire was designed in consultation with the Digestive Health Network. The final draft of the questionnaire was approved by the Executive Director, Health Policy and Clinical Reform.

During June 2007, the questionnaire was mailed to 1838 WA general practitioners with a covering letter explaining the purposes of the study, an assurance of confidentiality and a reply-paid addressed envelope. A copy of the questionnaire is presented in Appendix 1.

The results were analysed using the SPSS statistical package. Frequencies were calculated and graphs produced. In this report cases with missing values are included in the data.



## 3.0 RESULTS

### 3.1 Response Rate

A total of 1838 questionnaires were mailed out, and 550 replies were received which represents a response rate of 29.92%.

### 3.2 Access to best practice information

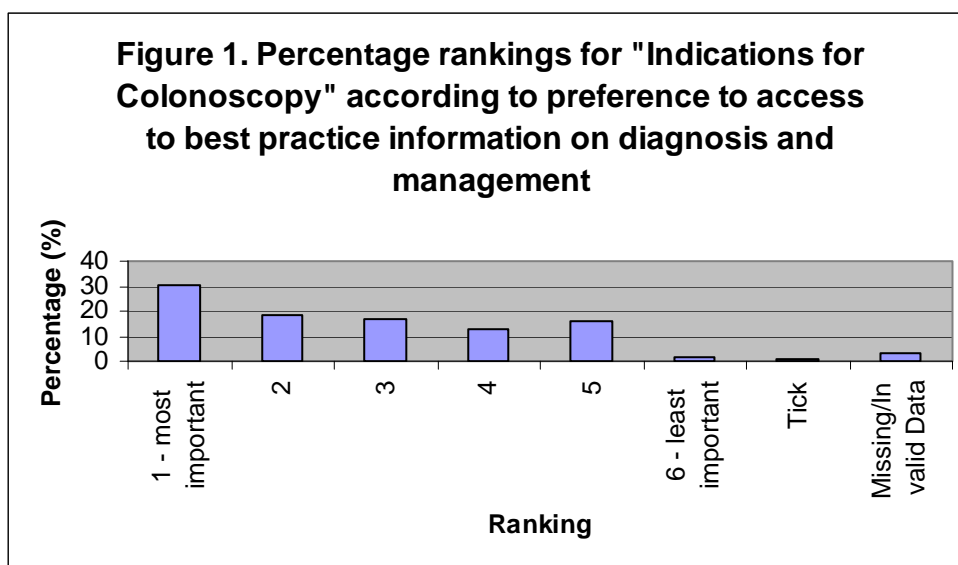
GPs were asked to rank a number of conditions according to their preference for access to best practice information on diagnosis and/or management (where 1= most important and 6 = least important).

The following digestive conditions were identified by members of the Digestive Health Network Executive Advisory Group to be covered by the survey:

- Screening and surveillance indications for colonoscopy
- Reflux Alarm Symptoms
- Abnormal Liver Function Tests
- Coeliac disease
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome
- Other (please specify)

#### 3.2.1 Indications for colonoscopy

Figure 1 shows the percentage rankings for "Indications for Colonoscopy" according to preference to access to best practice information on diagnosis and management.

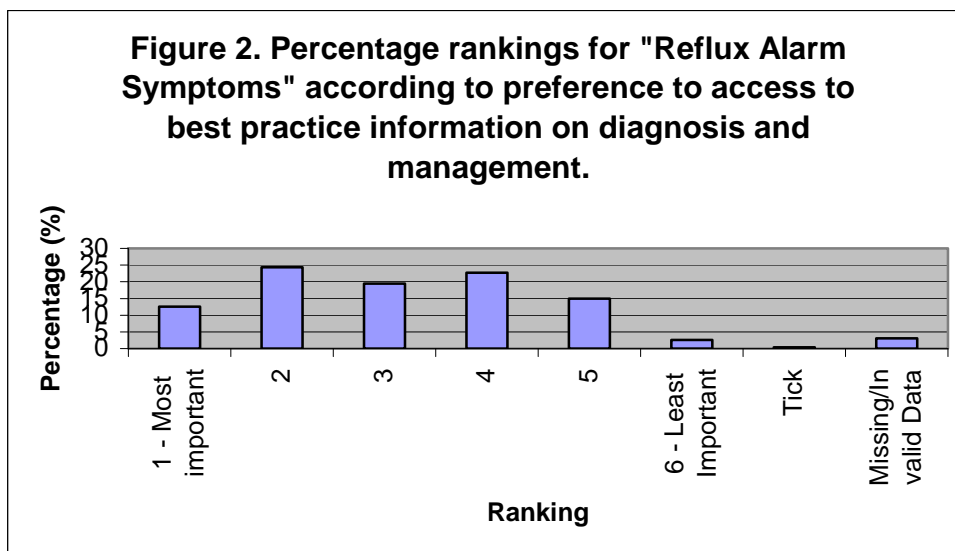


30.2% of respondents ranked "Indications for Colonoscopy" as number 1.



### 3.2.2 Reflux Alarm Symptoms

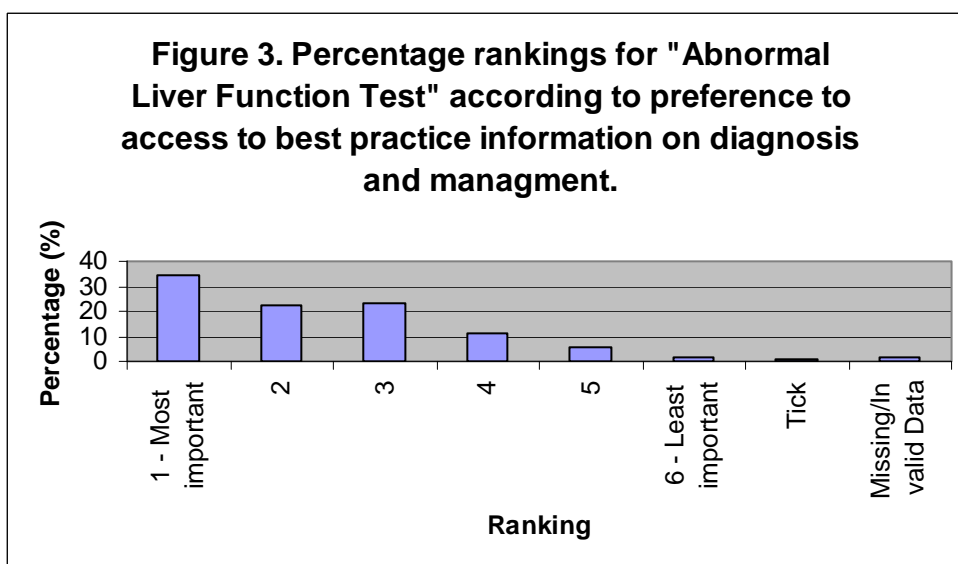
Figure 2 shows the percentage rankings for “Reflux Alarm Symptoms” according to preference to access to best practice information on diagnosis and management.



**12.5% of respondents ranked “Reflux Alarm Symptoms” as number 1.**

### 3.2.3 Abnormal Liver Function Tests

Figure 3 shows the percentage rankings for “Abnormal Liver Function Tests” according to preference to access to best practice information on diagnosis and management.



**34.2% of respondents ranked “Abnormal Liver Function Tests” as number 1.**



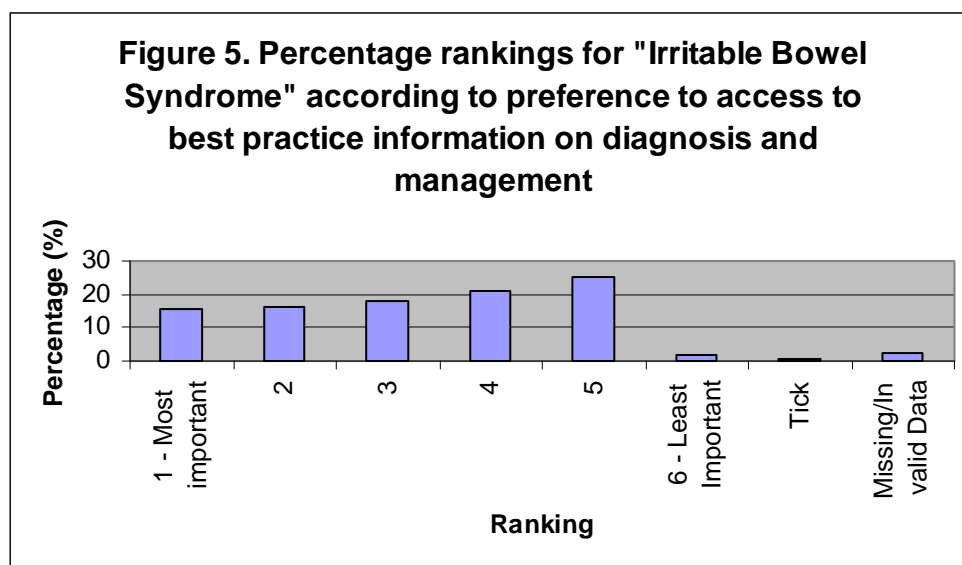
### 3.2.4 Coeliac Disease

Figure 4 shows the percentage rankings for “Coeliac Disease” according to preference to access to best practice information on diagnosis and management.

5.5% of respondents ranked “Coeliac Disease” as number 1.

### 3.2.5 Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Figure 5 shows the percentage rankings for “Irritable Bowel Syndrome” according to preference to access to best practice information on diagnosis and management.



**15.8% of respondents ranked “Irritable Bowel Syndrome” as number 1.**

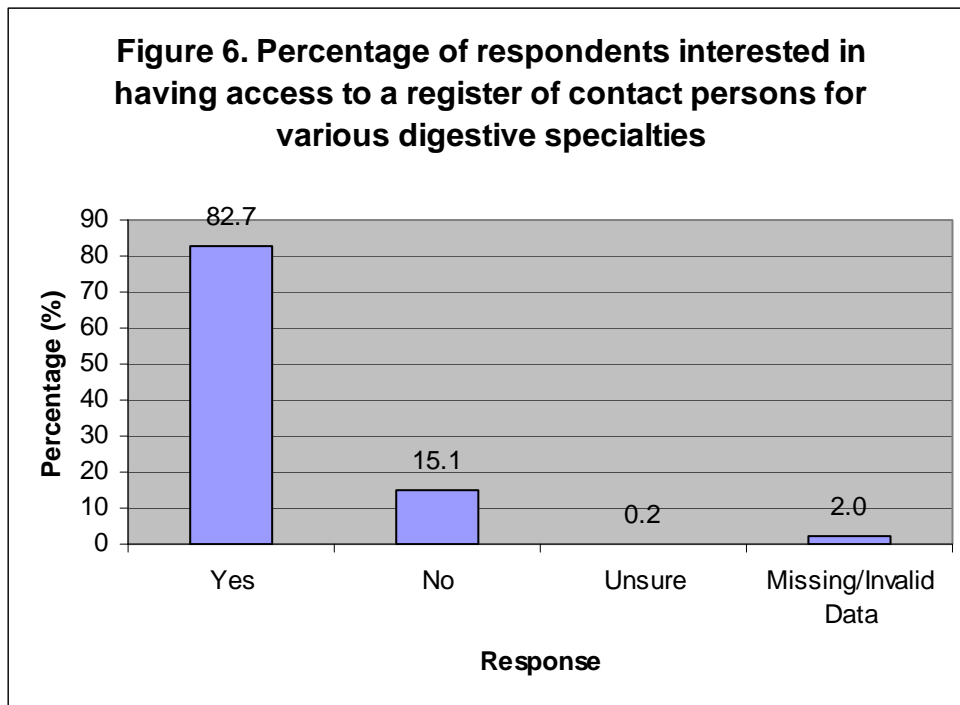
### 3.2.6 Other

Overall, 19.8% of respondents included “other” in their rankings. Of these 19.8% of respondents, the most common conditions specified are as follows:

- inflammatory bowel disease (15.3%),
- helicobacter pylori (9.4%),
- constipation or diarrhea (8.2%),
- cancer (e.g. gastric, bowel, colon) (5.9%),
- haemochromatosis (4.7%),
- Crohn’s Disease (4.7%), hepatitis B or C (4.7%)
- pain (e.g. abdominal, epigastric, reflux) (4.7%).

## 3.3 Register of contact persons

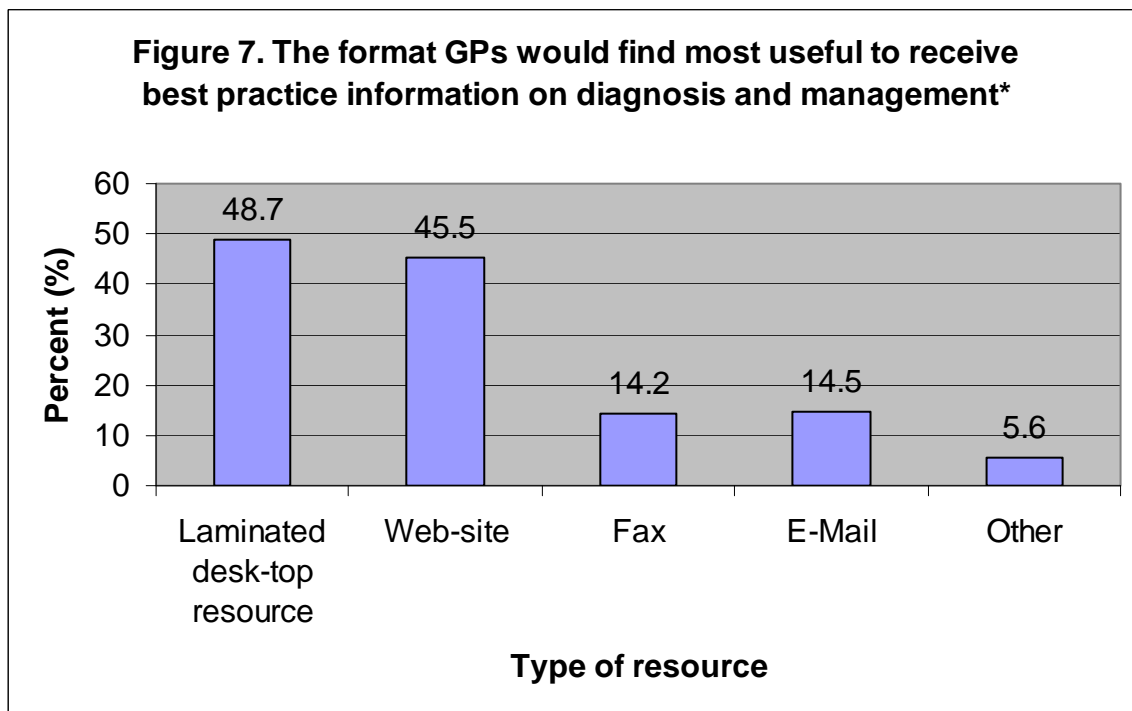
Figure 6 shows the percentage of GPs interested in having access to a register of contact persons for various digestive specialties.



The figure shows that 82.7% of respondents were interested in having access to a register of contact persons for various digestive specialties. 15.1% indicated that they would not be interested. Many of the respondent that declined stated that a register was already available.

### 3.4 Format of additional information

Figure 7 shows the format that would be most useful to the GP's, if additional information was produced.



\* Total exceeds 100% as multiple responses were permitted



48.7% of respondents indicated that a laminated desk-top resource would be the most useful method of receiving best practice information. This was followed by web-site (45.5%), fax (14.2%), e-mail (14.5%) and other (5.6%). Of the small number of respondents that specified "other", the most common resources were leaflets/pamphlets/fact sheets or via other electronic means (e.g. word, pdf, information downloadable into GP software packages, CD, DVD).



## 4.0 DISCUSSION

The General Practitioner Survey identified the following top three conditions in order of priority for best practice information:

1. Abnormal liver function tests
2. Screening and surveillance indications for colonoscopy
3. Irritable Bowel Syndrome

It is significant that the Digestive Health Network has already commenced work on a Colonoscopy Services Model of Care, which will be a major network project in 2008. This will include best practice information for GPs.

The Digestive Health Network Executive Advisory Group (EAG) has also commenced work on the provision and distribution of guidelines for abnormal liver function tests and the dietary management of Irritable Bowel Syndrome. Consideration is also being given to the development of guidelines for the management of Inflammatory Bowel Disease.

Following endorsement and approval, it is proposed that the guidelines are placed on the Digestive Section of the Health Networks website in addition to being made readily available through general practitioner organizations and networks. This may include the production a laminated desktop resource, an information format that was favored by almost half of general practitioners who participated in the survey.

The EAG will also consider the development of a register contact gastroenterologists working in the public health system to support general practitioners in the diagnosis and management of digestive conditions. This will supplement the register of specialists in private practice that is currently available in booklet form.



## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: GP Survey Questionnaire

#### GP SURVEY - DIGESTIVE HEALTH

This brief survey seeks to identify some of the most commonly referred digestive conditions on which GPs may wish to receive the latest best practice information, guidelines or diagnostic algorithms. Responses to the survey will assist in the development of the information in the most useful format.

1. Please rank the following according to your preference (1 - most, 6 - least) for access to best practice information on diagnosis and management:

- Screening and surveillance indications for colonoscopy
- Reflux Alarm Symptoms
- Abnormal Liver Function Tests
- Coeliac Disease flowchart
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome
- Other (please specify)

I do not wish to access or receive the latest best practice information.

2. I would be interested in having access to a register of contact persons for various digestive specialties.

Yes

No

3. If additional information was produced according to survey preferences, what format would be most useful:

Laminated desk-top resource

Web-site

Fax

E mail

Other (please specify)

*Thank you for your time*



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