MINISTRY OF HEALTH
SINGAPORE

PRIMARY CARE SURVEY 2010
PROFILE OF PRIMARY CARE PATIENTS

By Sng Qing Si[1]

Abstract

This paper presents key findings from the Primary Care Survey conducted in 2010 on the profile of patients who seek primary care services at Polyclinics and Private GP Clinics.

Introduction

1. The Primary Care Survey 2010 (PCS 2010) is a one-day morbidity survey that collects de-identified information on the morbidity and biographic profile of patients seen by General Practitioners (GPs) in the public and private sector. Besides patient information, the survey also collects information on doctors and clinic practice. PCS 2010 was commissioned by the Ministry of Health (MOH), with support from the College of Family Physicians and the Singapore Medical Association.

2. This information paper profiles the patients who seek primary care at Polyclinics and Private GP Clinics.

Survey Design & Methodology

3. The one-day survey was conducted on 22 September 2010 (Wednesday) with a make-up survey day on 26 October 2010 (Tuesday) for those clinics which were unable to participate on the first survey date.

4. The survey covered all 18 Polyclinics in the public sector and a randomly selected sample of 407 Private GP Clinics, which was proportionately stratified by geographical regions in Singapore. All 18 Polyclinics and some 365 Private GP Clinics participated in the survey, achieving an overall response rate of 90%.

How many patients sought primary care?

5. Primary care attendances across the island on the day of survey in 2010 were 18% higher than that in 2005. This is commensurate with the 19% growth in total population[2] over this period. Well[3] visits grew by 40%, while sick[4] visits grew to a lesser extent by 16%. Private GP Clinics experienced the most growth in primary care attendances.

Table 1: Growth in Sick & Well Visits by Sector

	ALL Clinics		Polyclinics		Private GP Clinics	
	2005	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010
Total No. of Patients (on survey day)	50,596	59,687	11,244	11,553	39,352	48,134
Growth (% change 2010/2005)		18%		3%		22%
Total No. of "Sick" Visit Patients (on survey day)	46,375	53,757	10,592	10,935	35,783	42,822
Growth (% change 2010/2005)		16%		3%		20%

[1] Sng Qing Si is a Senior Research Analyst with the Health Information Division, MOH.
[2] Source: Department of Statistics, Monthly Digest of Statistics, June 2011
[3] "Well" visits are made by patients who come for immunisation, pre-employment medical check, preventive care for females, developmental assessments for children, family planning visits, etc.
[4] "Sick" visits are made by patients who have medical complaints.

Table 1: Growth in Sick & Well Visits by Sector (cont'd)

	ALL Clinics		Polyclinics		Private GP Clinics	
	2005	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010
Total No. of "Well" Visit Patients (on survey day)	4,221	5,930	652	618	3,569	5,312
Growth (% change 2010/2005)		40%		-5%		49%

How are primary care attendances split between Polyclinics and Private GP Clinics?

6. Private GP Clinics remain the main provider of primary care services, seeing 81% of primary care attendances. The remaining 19% of attendances are seen by Polyclinics.

Table 2: Market Share Split between Public & Private Sector – All Attendances

	Polyclinics	Private GP Clinics
2005	22%	78%
2010	19%	81%

7. Compared to 2005, patients are increasingly turning to Private GP Clinics for both sick and well visits.

Table 3: Market Share Split between Public & Private Sector – Sick & Well Visits

	Polyclinics	Private GP Clinics
Sick Visits		
2005	23%	77%
2010	20%	80%
Well Visits		
2005	15%	85%
2010	10%	90%

8. However, when it comes to Chronic[5] Conditions, 45% of chronic attendances are seen by Polyclinics, while the remaining 55% are seen by Private GP Clinics. Chronic patients are increasingly turning to Polyclinics, with a 3% shift in market share compared to 2005.

9. While polyclinics attend to 45% of chronic patients on the survey day, it deployed only 14% of all resident[6] GPs in Singapore.

Table 4: Market Share Split between Public & Private Sector – Chronic Conditions

	Polyclinics	Private GP Clinics
2005	42%	58%
2010	45%	55%

What are the common conditions seen?

10. The conditions of patients which constitute 5% or more of all diagnoses seen on the survey day are presented in Table 5.

[5] Chronic Conditions refer to conditions that require long term follow-up and in general, regular medications and management of risk factors, such as hypertension, asthma and chronic obstructive lung disease, diabetes and cancers.

[6] This refers to the headcount of Resident GPs who perform clinical work in the clinic, regardless of whether he/she is working on the survey day. Resident GPs refer to doctors who are permanently employed in the clinic, including those who work on fixed days in a week or on rotational basis to various clinics in the same group. There may be double-counting across clinics, but this is expected to be minimal for Resident GPs.

11. At 25%, Upper Respiratory Tract Infections (URTI) remains the predominant condition seen in both 2005 and 2010. Next is Hypertension (essential, benign) at 8% of all diagnosis in 2010 and 10% in 2005.

Table 5: Common Conditions seen in All Clinics

	ALL Clinics	n=62,318	n=77,342
Rank	All Diagnosis	2005	2010
1	URTI	25%	25%
2	Hypertension, essential, benign	10%	8%
3	Hyperlipidemia	5%	6%
4	Symptoms (Exclude Fever & GIT Symptoms)	4%	5%
5	Musculoskeletal, Soft Tissue & Joint Conditions (Include SLE)	5%	5%
6	Dermatological	6%	5%

12. Similar to 2005, majority of patients with URTI seek care at Private GP Clinics rather than Polyclinics.

Table 6: Market Share Split between Public & Private Sector – Upper Respiratory Tract Infections

Principal Diagnosis	Year	Count	Polyclinics	Private GP Clinics
Upper Respiratory Tract Infections (URTI)	2005	14,704	14%	86%
	2010	17,585	13%	87%

Where do chronic patients seek care?

13. Patients with specific chronic conditions such as diabetes, lipid disorders, hypertension and asthma are presented in Tables 7 to 9.

14. Polyclinics see a larger share of diabetic patients, with 66% of them turning to Polyclinics.

Table 7: Market Share Split between Public & Private Sector – Diabetes Mellitus

Principal Diagnosis	Year	Count	Polyclinics	Private GP Clinics
Diabetes mellitus	2005	2,030	67%	33%
	2010	2,835	66%	34%

15. Patients with Lipid Disorders are equally likely to visit the Polyclinics and Private GP Clinics, while Private GP Clinics take on a larger share of about 60% of patients with Hypertension.

Table 8: Market Share Split between Public & Private Sector – Lipid Disorders & Hypertension

Principal Diagnosis	Year	Count	Polyclinics	Private GP Clinics
Lipid disorders	2005	705	48%	52%
	2010	1,026	50%	50%
Hypertension	2005	4,539	45%	55%
	2010	4,196	42%	58%

16. Private GP Clinics take on a much larger share of patients with Respiratory Conditions, with 75% of patients with Asthma visiting Private GP Clinics for their condition.

Table 9: Market Share Split between Public & Private Sector – Asthma

Principal Diagnosis	Year	Count	Polyclinics	Private GP Clinics
Asthma	2005	634	27%	73%
	2010	605	25%	75%

Where do aging patients seek care?

17. 47% of elderly residents[7] visit the Polyclinics, with the remaining 53% visiting the Private GP Clinics. Increasingly, elderly residents are turning to the Polyclinics for primary care services.

Table 10: Market Share Split between Public & Private Sector – Elderly Residents

Elderly Residents (65 years & above)	Polyclinics	Private GP Clinics
2005	43%	57%
2010	47%	53%

Where do lower income groups seek care?

18. Patients in the lower income group (proxy to patients living in HDB 1-3 rooms) are served in the Polyclinics as well as the Private GP Clinics. Polyclinics see 28% of patients living in HDB 1-3 rooms, while the remaining 72% visited Private GP Clinics, similar to 2005.

Table 11: Market Share Split between Public & Private Sector – By House-Type

	Year	Polyclinics	Private GP Clinics
HDB 1-3 room	2005	27%	73%
	2010	28%	72%
HDB 4-5 room/ multi-generation/ executive/ HUDC	2005	24%	76%
	2010	22%	78%
Private apartment/ house	2005	12%	88%
	2010	15%	85%

Where do Singaporeans and Foreigners seek Primary Care?

19. While the Foreign population has grown by 64%[8] in the last 5 years, majority of Foreigners working or living in Singapore visited Private GP Clinics, rather than the Polyclinics. Compared to 2005, a larger share of Foreigners are visiting Private GP Clinics.

20. The share of Residents[9] visiting Private GP Clinics has also increased by 2% since 2005, although increasing at a lesser extent when compared to Foreigners.

Table 12: Market Share Split between Public & Private Sector – By Residential Status

	Year	Polyclinics	Private GP Clinics
Residents	2005	24%	76%
	2010	22%	78%
Foreigners working/ living in Singapore	2005	13%	87%
	2010	8%	92%

Concluding Remarks

21. We see a key role for Polyclinics as well as Private GPs in managing the growing burden of chronic diseases. To enable GPs who are easily accessible to patients (especially the elderly) to play a greater role in chronic disease management, MOH has made changes to the Primary Care Partnership Scheme (PCPS), which include lowering of the age cut-off from 65 to 40, and providing increased subsidies to help needy patients. MOH is also considering other enablers such as support services for GPs to enhance care in the community.

[7] Residents refer to Singapore Citizens and Permanent Residents.
[8] Source: Department of Statistics, Monthly Digest of Statistics, June 2011
[9] Residents refer to Singapore Citizens and Permanent Residents.