

INTRODUCTION

Family of Studies

The Community Health Research Group (CHRG) at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK), through funding from the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), is conducting a family of four studies to estimate the prevalence of alcohol and other psychoactive drug (AOD) use and need for treatment for AOD dependence in the Tennessee adult population. These studies also target specific high-risk groups, such as arrestees and hospital emergency room (ER) patients. Data from these studies will strengthen Tennessee's annual block grant application for federal funds to support the substance abuse treatment initiatives spearheaded by the Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Services in the Tennessee Department of Health. Three of these studies are similar to ones conducted in other states; a Drug Use Forecasting (DUF)/Substance Abuse Need for Treatment Assessment (SANTA) study of new arrestees, a household survey, and a social indicators study. This report pertains to the unique study in this family of studies, the population-based Tennessee Hospital Emergency Room Drug Study.

Study Purpose

The primary purpose of the ER drug study was to estimate the prevalence of AOD use and dependence among Tennessee's adult ER patients. In turn, these estimates would form a basis for determining the need for treatment services in this high risk population. Secondary and longer term purposes were to examine links between AOD use, on the one hand, and health status and health care access, on the other.

Rationale and Literature Review

Existing research suggests that AOD abuse produces adverse health effects -- disease, injury and disability.¹ In turn, these diminish the quantity and quality of life and concomitantly magnify national and state health care burdens. They also produce high socioeconomic costs -- an estimated \$277 billion nationally in 1995.² These include health care expenditures, productivity losses, and the financial impact of AOD abuse on the criminal justice and social welfare infrastructures.

An emerging aspect of ER-based health care, a front line between ill and injured individuals and organized health care, is toxicological screening and testing or bioanalysis. Although screening and testing have become more pervasive in ERs, physicians and staff do not routinely record patient drug histories or determine dependence and treatment needs. This study addresses that information gap, documenting the nature and magnitude of AOD problems in the Tennessee hospital ER population. Moreover, it estimates the need for treatment in that population.