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Number of U.S. Emergency Department Visits Involving Nonmedical Use of Pharmaceuticals Increases from 2004 to 2005

An estimated 598,542 U.S. emergency department (ED) visits in 2005 involved the nonmedical use of prescription or over-the-counter pharmaceuticals or dietary supplements, an increase of 21% more than 2004 estimates. According to recently released data from the Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN), the greatest increase occurred for visits involving stimulant drugs (33% increase), followed by respiratory agents such as antihistamines and decongestants (31% increase), and opioids (24% increase). The only other pharmaceutical drugs that showed statistically significant increases in ED-involved visits between 2004 and 2005 were antipsychotics and benzodiazepines. The report notes that “it is not possible to know, based on the documentation available in ED medical records, the extent to which the source of these drugs is a legitimate prescription, as opposed to other sources”(p. 9).

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Office of Applied Studies (OAS), *Drug Abuse Warning Network 2005: National Estimates of Drug-Related Emergency Department Visits*, 2007. Available online at <https://dawninfo.samhsa.gov>.