

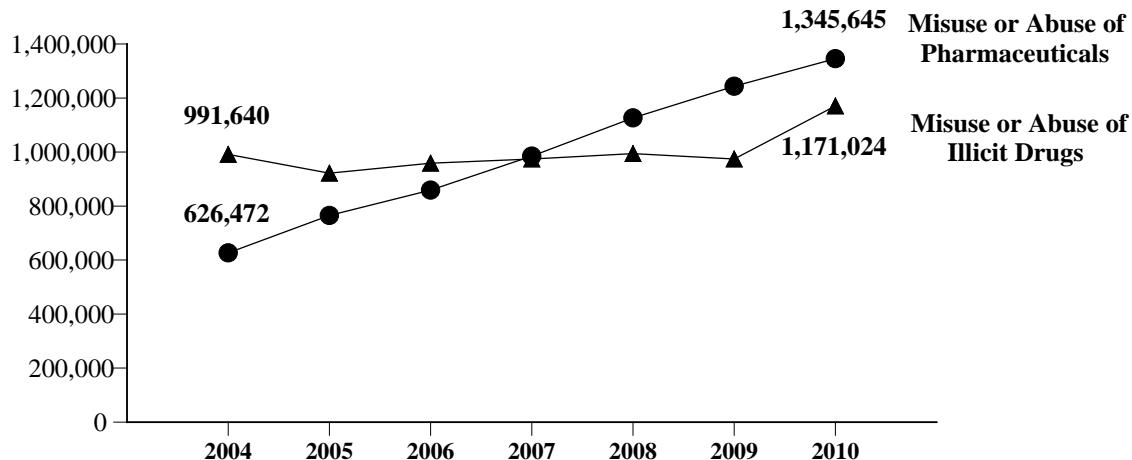
A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

Estimated Number of Emergency Department Visits for Misuse or Abuse of Pharmaceuticals More Than Doubles from 2004 to 2010

The estimated number of drug-related emergency department (ED) visits involving the misuse or abuse of pharmaceuticals increased significantly from 2004 to 2010, according to data from the Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN). More than 626,000 ED visits in 2004 were related to the misuse or abuse of pharmaceuticals, compared to more than 1.3 million in 2010. In 2010, approximately one-half (49%) of these pharmaceutical misuse or abuse visits involved pain relievers (both opioid and non-opioid) and more than one-third (35%) involved drugs to treat insomnia and anxiety. In contrast, the number of ED visits involving illicit drug use was relatively stable from 2004 to 2009, and then increased by 20% from 2009 to 2010 (see figure below). There were more than 1.1 million ED visits related to the misuse or abuse of illicit drugs in 2010, primarily for cocaine (42%) and marijuana (39%). The authors suggest that educational efforts “emphasize the difference between appropriate therapeutic use and drug misuse or abuse” and that “raising awareness among first responders, such as emergency medical technicians and emergency department staff, about the possible effects of pharmaceuticals and appropriate treatments can also help reduce the negative effects of these drugs on patients’ health and well-being” (p. 6-7).

Estimated Number of Drug-Related Emergency Department Visits Related to the Misuse or Abuse of Pharmaceuticals and Illicit Drugs, 2004 to 2010



NOTES: Estimates may be slightly different than those reported in previous years due to updating of DAWNS's drug categorization system and resultant reassignment of drugs to drug codes. Drug misuse or abuse is defined as visits that involve illicit drugs, nonmedical use of pharmaceuticals, and alcohol-related visits (in combination with other drugs for patients of all ages plus visits involving alcohol use with no other drugs for patients under the age of 21).

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), "Highlights of the 2010 Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) Findings on Drug-Related Emergency Department Visits," *The DAWN Report*, July 2, 2012. Available online at <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/2k12/DAWN096/SR096EDHighlights2010.pdf>.