

SUBSTANCE ABUSE (ALCOHOL/DRUG) AND THE EMERGENCY CARE SETTING

Substance abuse is a public health problem with great impact on emergency care and emergency nursing. In 2008, the Drug Abuse Warning Network estimated that there were 656,892 visits to the emergency department related to alcohol use and 993,379 related to illicit drug use. Substance abuse is associated with and contributes to many health-related problems that emergency nurses identify and manage. Emergency nurses are in a unique position to assess situations and individuals affected by substance abuse and initiate strategies for prevention, education, treatment, and rehabilitation.

It is the position of the Emergency Nurses Association that:

1. Substance abuse is a major emergency care and public health concern requiring strategies and resources including:
 - Access to prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation services for those affected by substance abuse
 - Treatment according to current standards of practice for those suffering from the disease of substance abuse and the consequences of substance abuse
 - Education and programs through the Emergency Nurses Association Institute for Quality, Safety and Injury Prevention should be utilized
 - Inclusion of substance abuse treatment in the benefits package planned under health care reform
 - Legislation to prevent injuries and fatalities due to substance abuse
2. Emergency nurses should use the principles of crisis intervention in the acute care phase of substance abuse episodes.
3. Emergency nurses should advocate for patients affected by substance abuse by pursuing social services and psychiatric consultations and referrals to substance abuse programs as part of the emergency department discharge plan.
4. Emergency nurses and other health care providers should participate in ongoing education related to substance abuse and treatment.

Resources

National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2009). *InfoFacts: Understanding drug abuse and addiction*. Retrieved from <http://www.drugabuse.gov/infofacts/understand.html>

World Health Organization. (2010). *Management of substance abuse: Facts and figures*. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/substance_abuse/facts/en/index.html

Drug Abuse Warning Network. (2008). *Detailed tables: National estimates, drug-related emergency department visits for 2004–2008*. Retrieved from <https://dawninfo.samhsa.gov/data/default.asp?met=All>

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