Patients with Risky Substance Use in Primary Care Settings

- About 20% of primary care patients screen positive for unhealthy alcohol use.[1]
- Systematic review of 12 RCTS in the U.S. reported that about 8% to 18% of patients screened positive.[2]
- One review found that prevalence estimates among primary care patients range from 4% to 29% for risk/hazardous drinkers, 0.3% to 10% for harmful drinkers, and 2% to 9% for alcohol dependence.[3]
- One review found that 9% of patients screened positive for excessive alcohol use.[4]
- A study in primary care found that 38% screened positive for low-risk drinking, 9% for at-risk drinking, 8% for problem drinking, and 5% for dependence. 20% reported using illicit drugs 5 or more times in their lifetime and 5% were current illicit drug users.[5]

PCPs are major behavioral health providers

- National survey between 2001 and 2002 found that 55.1% of treated 12-month MDD cases occurred in SMH and 16% of treated cases occurred in human services.[6]
- Based on data from the NIMH Epidemiologic Catchment Area Program, the majority of visits among treated patients with mental or addictive disorders were to specialty settings (40.5% of total visits) and to support networks (37.0% of total visits). Large number of persons with mental and substance use disorders were seen in the general medical sector; however, they were seen less frequently (10.9% of total visits).[7]
- Based on interviews of adults in the NIMH Epidemiologic Catchment Area Program, researchers estimated that specialists in mental and addictive disorders provided treatment to 5.9% of the U.S. population. 6.4% sought such services from general medical physicians, 3.0% sought these services from other human service professionals, and 4.1% turned to the voluntary support sector for such care.[8]
- Analyses of a national datasets showed that 3%, 3%, and 1% of workers with alcohol abuse/dependence seek care from mental health only, medical only, and both mental health and medical, respectively. 4%, 3%, and 2% of workers with drug abuse/dependence seek care from mental health only, medical only, and both mental health and medical, respectively.[9]

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