

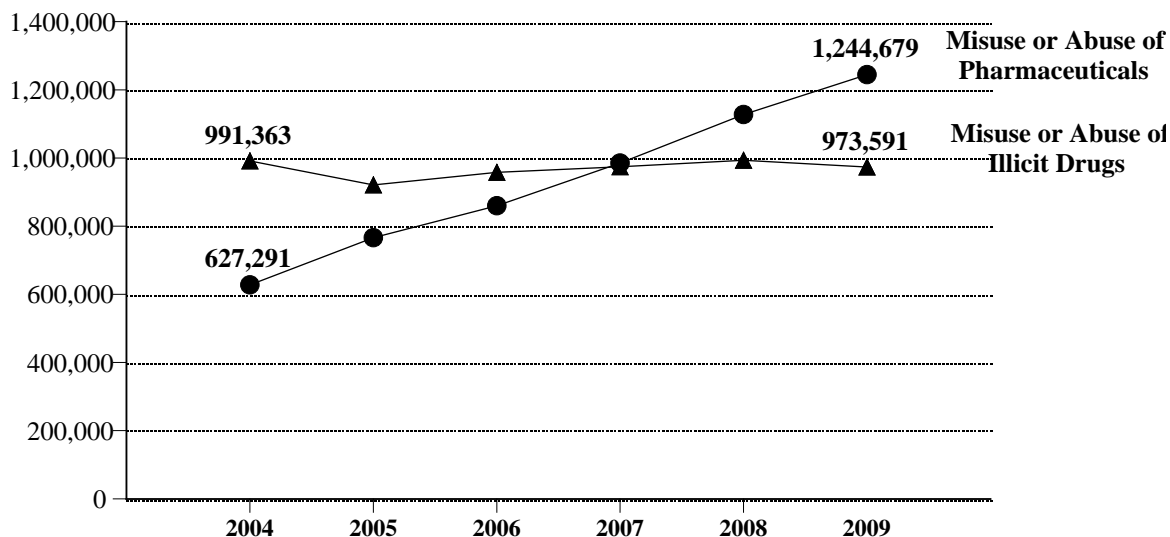
A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

Estimated Number of Emergency Department Visits for Misuse or Abuse of Pharmaceuticals Nearly Doubles from 2004 to 2009

The estimated number of emergency department (ED) visits involving the misuse or abuse of pharmaceuticals increased significantly from 2004 to 2009, according to data from the Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN). Nearly 630,000 ED visits in 2004 were related to the misuse or abuse of pharmaceuticals, compared to more than 1.2 million in 2009. In 2009, approximately one-half (48%) of these pharmaceutical misuse or abuse visits involved pain relievers,* 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 over the same time period (see figure below). There were 973,591 ED visits related to the misuse or abuse of illicit drugs in 2009, primarily for cocaine (43%) and marijuana (39%). According to the authors, these findings highlight the “importance of heightening emergency room medical staff’s awareness of nonmedical use of pharmaceuticals, because these personnel might be the first responders to people in need of intervention and treatment” (p. 7).

Estimated Number of Drug-Related Emergency Department Visits Related to the Misuse or Abuse of Pharmaceuticals and Illicit Drugs, 2004 to 2009



*The 2009 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) found that 14% of U.S. residents reported lifetime nonmedical use of prescription pain relievers (see *CESAR FAX*, Volume 19, Issue 45). In addition, treatment admissions involving pain reliever abuse increased fourfold from 1998 to 2008 (see *CESAR FAX*, Volume 19, Issue 28).

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), “Highlights of the 2009 Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) Findings on Drug-Related Emergency Department Visits,” *The DAWN Report*, December 28, 2010. Available online at https://dawninfo.samhsa.gov/files/SpecTopics/DAWN2010_SR034.pdf.