

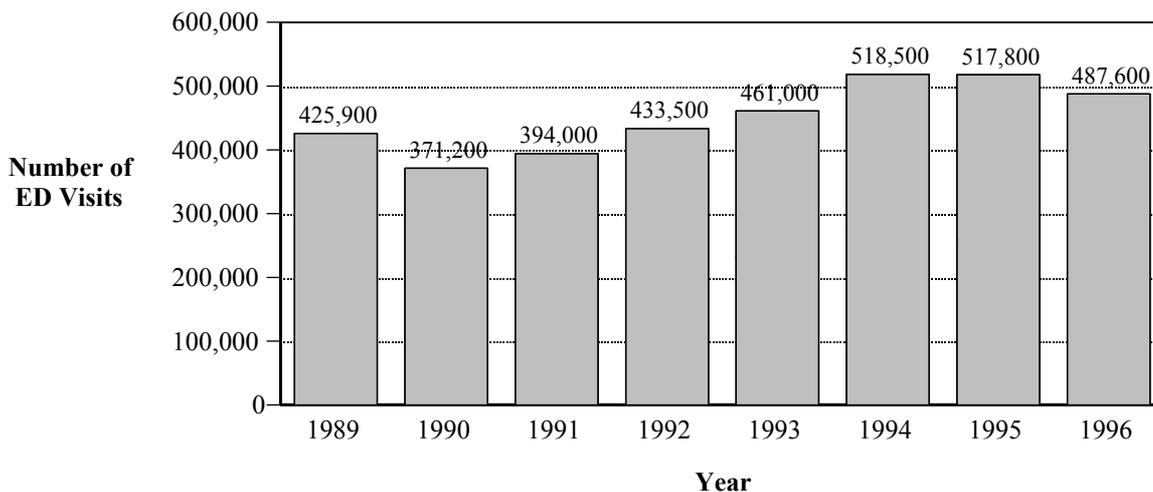
A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

National Drug-Related Emergency Department Visits May Have Peaked

The number of national emergency department (ED) visits directly related to drug use may be leveling off after peaking in 1994, according to preliminary estimates from the 1996 Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN). Between 1990 and 1994, the estimated number of drug-related ED visits increased from 371,200 to 518,500, the highest level since the DAWN survey of hospital EDs began in 1978. This rise was primarily driven by an increase in cocaine- and heroin-related ED visits. Since 1994, however, there have been no statistically significant increases in the total number of drug-related ED visits. In fact, between 1994 and 1996, the number of such visits decreased by 6% (from 518,500 to 487,600). The authors caution that “it is important to recognize that DAWN data do not measure the prevalence of drug use, but rather the health consequences of drug use expressed as emergency department visits” (p. 18).

Estimated Number of Drug-Related Emergency Department Visits, 1989-1996



NOTE: A drug-related ED visit is defined as “an emergency department visit that was directly related to the use of an illegal drug or the non-medical use of a legal drug for persons aged 6 years and older.” The number of ED visits is not the same as the number of individuals involved, since “one person may make repeated visits to an emergency department” (p. 21).

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from data from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Office of Applied Studies (OAS), “Year-End Preliminary Estimates from the 1996 Drug Abuse Warning Network,” Drug Abuse Warning Network Series D-3, November 1997. To obtain a copy of the report, contact the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI) at 301-468-2600 or 800-729-6686.