

One in five Winnipeg adults goes to an emergency room at least once a year, study says

The University of Manitoba-based Manitoba Centre for Health Policy has issued a report on emergency departments (EDs) and urgent care (UC) in Winnipeg, showing who visits them, how often, and what other health care services these people use.

“Emergency Departments in Winnipeg are busy and complex places,” says the primary report author, Dr. Malcolm Doupe. “We used current data to create a snapshot of EDs, but better data are needed to conduct important research.”

For example, data are not currently collected on ED wait times, but are available only for the total time of an ED visit (combining wait and care times). “Total visit durations have actually increased in recent years,” Doupe notes, but “it is impossible to tell if this trend is due to longer wait times, longer care times, or a combination of both.” The study found that 25 per cent of ED visits in 2004/05 lasted six or more hours.

The study also reported about 2,400 “frequent ED users,” defined as people with seven or more ED visits in one year. These individuals comprised about two per cent of ED users during the one-year study period, but were responsible for about 14 per cent of all ED visits. More than half of these frequent users had been diagnosed in the past as having two or more types of mental illness, such as substance abuse, personality disorders, schizophrenia and dementia. Just less than

85 per cent of highly frequent ED users (those with 18 or more ED visits in one year) had two or more types of these mental illness diagnoses.

Frequent and highly frequent users also tend to reside in the core of Winnipeg (Point Douglas or downtown). These patients often have many visits to other health care providers, including primary care physicians and visits to urgent care.

“In total, frequent ED users had just under 80,000 contacts with the overall health care system in one year, with half of the users (median) having 27 or more visits in a year,” says Doupe. “During this same time period, people with one ED visit had a median of six total contacts with the health care system.”

The study also found that highly frequent ED users often arrive to an ED by ambulance, only to be triaged as less or non-urgent, or to leave without being seen.

“From our results, it is clear that frequent ED users have a range of complex problems that are quite different from the average Winnipeg adult,” says Doupe. “Innovative strategies, involving both the community and the health care system, are required to help provide care to these people.”

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outlook

Conference watch

World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine

World Conference on Disaster and Emergency Medicine will hold its biennial conference Victoria, British Columbia, May 12–15, 2009.

This conference will host between 600 and 1,000 delegates from around the world, involving experts in public health, government, industry, military and civilian organizations.

For further information and registration forms brochure submission of articles, etc., e-mail: info@wcdem2009.org

NENA Conference 2009

Dates for the conference will be April 23–25, 2009, in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

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