

Data Spotlight

Drug Abuse Warning Network

May 22, 2012

Adverse Drug Reactions Are Often the Reason for Emergency Department Visits Resulting in Hospitalization among Older Adults

In 2009, more than one half million drug-related emergency department (ED) visits made by adults aged 50 or older resulted in hospitalization. The majority of these visits (71 percent) involved adverse reactions to pharmaceuticals.¹ Adverse reactions accounted for a larger proportion of ED visits resulting in hospitalization among patients aged 65 or older (87 percent) than among those aged 50 to 64 (48 percent) (Figure).

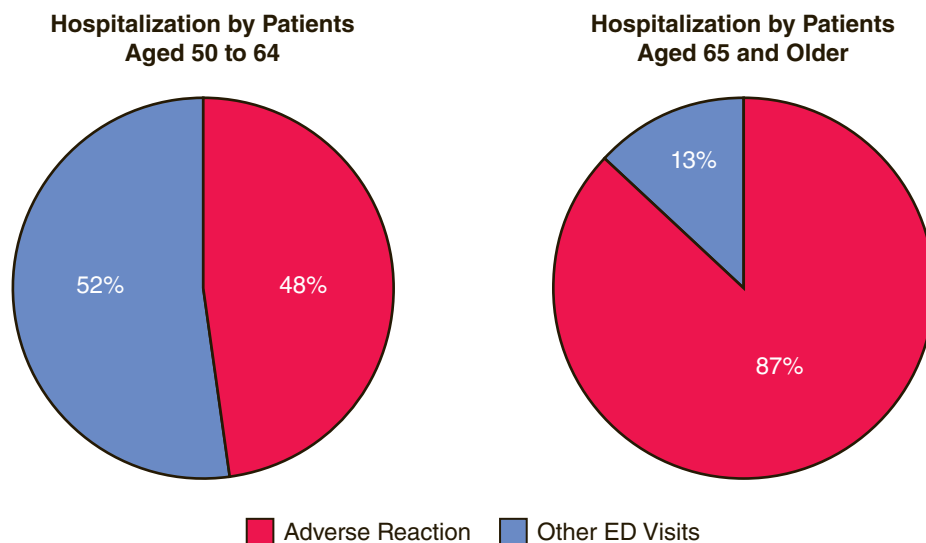
Older adults are at particular risk for experiencing adverse reactions to medications. Compared with younger adults, they are more sensitive to medications and more likely to take multiple medications because they have more health problems that require treatment.² Older adults may also experience cognitive issues or memory problems that affect their ability to understand and follow medication instructions.³ To learn more about how to prevent adverse reactions to medications, older adults and their families can visit http://www.cdc.gov/MedicationSafety/Adult_AdverseDrugEvents.html.

¹ In DAWN, ED visits involving adverse reactions include those in which a prescription or over-the-counter pharmaceutical was taken for therapeutic purposes and was used as prescribed or directed, but caused adverse reactions, side effects, drug-drug interactions, or drug-alcohol interactions.

² Routledge, P. A., O'Mahony, M. S., & Woodhouse, K. W. (2003). Adverse drug reactions in elderly patients. *British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology*, 57(2), 121-126. doi:10.1046/j.1365-2125.2003.01875.x

³ American Society on Aging and American Society of Consultant Pharmacists Foundation. (2006). *Adult medication: Improving medication adherence in older adults*. Retrieved from http://www.adultmedication.com/downloads/Adult_Medication.pdf

Drug-Related Emergency Department (ED) Visits Resulting in Hospitalization among Adults Aged 50 or Older, by Type of Visit and Age Group: 2009



Source: The Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) is a public health surveillance system that monitors drug-related hospital emergency department (ED) visits and drug-related deaths to track the impact of drug use, misuse, and abuse in the United States.

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