

'Text Message Medicine' Fights Binge Drinking



According to a study published online in 'Annals of Emergency Medicine', mobile phone text messages could be used as a means to help young adults reduce their dependence on alcohol. Researchers noted a significant reduction (over 50 percent) in alcohol use after young adult binge drinkers received cell phone texts following a visit to the emergency department.

In the US, more than 50,000 adults ages 18 to 24 visit ERs on a daily basis and about half of them have hazardous alcohol use patterns, according to Brian Suffoletto, MD, of the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine in Pittsburgh, Pa.

Hazardous or binge drinking is equated to five or more drinks per day for men and four or more drinks per day for women. Based on estimates by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 10 percent of deaths among working-age adults in the US is due to excessive alcohol consumption, including binge drinking.

"The emergency department," Dr. Suffoletto pointed out, "provides a unique setting to screen young adults for drinking problems and to engage with them via their preferred mode of communication to reduce future use."

In the study, the participants (765 young adult emergency patients with a history of hazardous drinking) were divided into three groups. For 12 weeks, one-third received text messages prompting them to reply to drinking-related questions. In return they were sent reply text messages giving feedback on their answers, aimed to strengthen their low-risk drinking plan or goal, or have them reflect on their drinking plan or their decision not to set a low-risk goal.

Meanwhile, one-third received only text message queries about their drinking and one-third received no text messages.

The results of the study showed:

- the first group (receiving both text message queries and feedback) decreased their self-reported binge drinking days by 51 percent and the number of drinks per day by 31 percent,
- the groups that received only text messages or no text messages increased the number of binge drinking days.

Alcohol is the fourth leading cause of preventable death in the United States. Dr. Suffoletto explained that help had to be given and bad drinking habits of people corrected while they were still young. "Alcohol may bring them to the ER, but we can do our part to keep them from becoming repeat visitors."

[Source: American College of Emergency Physicians](#)

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