

Sharp rise in street drug usage among stroke patients, study shows

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While smoking and alcohol use remained relatively stable over a 13-year study period, street drug use among stroke patients rose more than nine-fold, according to new research from the University of Cincinnati (UC).

The findings are being presented Wednesday, Feb. 9, in Los Angeles at International [Stroke](#) Conference (ISC) 2011, the annual meeting of the American Stroke Association, by Felipe De los Rios, MD, of the UC Department of Neurology and the UC Neuroscience Institute. De los Rios is a fourth-year resident in the neurology department.

The research is part of the Greater Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky Stroke Study, begun in 1993 at the UC College of Medicine, which is funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and identifies all hospitalized and autopsied cases of stroke and [transient ischemic attack](#) (TIA) in a five-county region. The NIH also funded the study led by De los Rios.

"We know that stroke incidence in younger age groups has increased over time in our region," says De los Rios, referring to UC research presented at last year's International Stroke Conference. "With street [drug use](#) more prevalent at younger ages, this could help explain that phenomenon."

Researchers examined three one-year periods: July 1993 to June 1994, 1999 and 2005, the latest year for which complete statistics are available. While current smoking (rising from 21 percent to 24 percent) and heavy alcohol use (dropping from 6 percent to 5 percent) remained relatively

stable, street drug use including marijuana and cocaine/crack, among others, rose from 0.5 percent in 1993-94 to 4.6 percent in 2005. (It was 1.5 percent in 1999.)

Street drug use information came from patients' charts or positive urine/blood tests. Current smoking was defined as present within the past three months; heavy alcohol use constituted three or more servings per day.

"The number of stroke subjects with street drug use is not trivial," says de los Rios, adding that the heaviest usage (21 percent) among [stroke patients](#) in 2005 was in the under-35 age group.

Data presented by UC researchers at ISC 2010 in San Antonio, also using information from the Greater Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky Stroke Study, showed the proportion of all strokes under age 45 in the area was up to 7.3 percent in 2005 from 4.5 percent in 1993-94 and 5.5 percent in 1999.

Provided by University of Cincinnati Academic Health Center

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