

Prescription assistance tied to fewer ER visits

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A graduate student at Washington State University Spokane is the lead author on a research paper that shows an overall drop in emergency room visits and hospitalizations by patients who are served by the Spokane Prescription Assistance Network, which helps low income people get free and reduced-price medications.

However, the decrease did not apply to all types of medications nor ages within the study group, and some actually saw increases in hospitalizations and ER visits.

Retired Spokane physician Samuel Selinger was an early organizer of the network and said this study - which has WSU faculty co-authors in the fields of pharmacy, nursing, medicine and [health](#) policy - shows the value of the prescription assistance program, which is part of a larger project he began 15 years ago to give the uninsured access to charity health care.

That project began with about 100 Spokane physicians (now more than 600) who agreed to pool the charity health care they offer so it could be distributed where needed in the greater Spokane region. Project organizers realized the need for prescription assistance and went to the Washington Legislature, which created the nonprofit Prescription Drug Assistance Foundation in 2005.

Research study highlights

- Published April 1, 2016, in the *Journal of Managed Care*

Pharmacy. Lead author is Mason H. Burley, a Ph.D. student in the interdisciplinary program at WSU Health Sciences in Spokane.

- 310 patients participated. Their [emergency room visits](#) and hospitalization records were tracked for one year before they received prescription assistance in 2012 and one year after.
- Those receiving pulmonary medications showed largest decrease in [acute care](#) contacts.
- However, those receiving psychotropic medications for mental health conditions saw an increase in acute care contacts.
- Similarly, the young adult age group 18-24 saw an increase in acute care contacts.
- The study raises the question for a future study into why those receiving psychotropic medications and young adults had more acute care contacts.

Prescription Assistance Drug Foundation highlights

- Washington Legislature approved in 2005 creation of this statewide nonprofit
- The 2015 Legislature expanded its reach into the underinsured population
- Started with pilot project in Spokane in 2008
- Clinics now located in Spokane, Seattle, Everett, Lynnwood, Edmonds, Shelton, Yakima, Toppenish, Grandview and Colfax.
- Governed by statewide board of directors
- Based in Spokane

The research is in keeping with Washington State University's Grand Challenges, a research initiative aimed at addressing several major societal issues. It is particularly relevant to the Sustaining Health challenge and its theme of promoting healthy communities and populations, as well as the Advancing Opportunity and Equity challenge.

Provided by Washington State University

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