

## Hospital admissions statistics in the news - behind the headlines

10 October 2008

Today the Daily Telegraph and Daily Mail reported that the number of patients "admitted to mental health wards" because of drug or alcohol misuse has risen "by almost a third in three years."

The stories related to a research paper published in the British Medical Journal part of which looked at NHS data on the number of hospital admissions between 1996 to 2006. The report, by Patrick Keown and his colleagues at Newcastle University, found that "since 2003, admissions for drug and alcohol related disorders increased by 29%."

This data is accurate, but having consulted with the report's author DrugScope can confirm that the figures relate to admissions to all NHS hospitals (including Accident and Emergency departments) not "mental health wards" as suggested in some sections of the press.

However, further analysis by DrugScope of raw data obtained from the NHS Information Centre shows that in the period 2002/2003 to 2005/2006 hospital admissions for drug related disorders (excluding alcohol) actually remained relatively stable, while alcohol related admissions rose from 28,835 to 39,863.

Any evidence of a rise in hospital admissions related to drugs or alcohol is a cause for concern and highlights the significant public health risk posed by substance misuse. However, it is important that all parties involved in the publishing and reporting of health information reduce the risk of misinterpretation by presenting data clearly.

This is not the first time hospital admissions statistics related to substance misuse and mental health have been misrepresented. In January of this year the Daily Telegraph published a front-page news article under the headline: *Abuse of cannabis puts 500 a week in hospital.*

In that instance, the article misrepresented figures given by Dawn Primarolo, Minister of State for Public Health, in response to a Parliamentary Question. The figures in question came from the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System which does not collect data on hospital admissions. Instead the statistics referred to the number of people coming forward to community-based drug treatment services related to their use of cannabis, something made clear in the minister's written response.

### Related Links

[Daily Mail - 'Number of drink and drug abusers filling mental hospitals soars by a third'](#)

[Daily Telegraph - 'Admissions to mental wards for drugs and alcohol up a third'](#)



[DrugScope response to Telegraph cannabis hospital admissions story Friday 11th January 2008](#) 12 January 2008

[Daily Telegraph \(11 January 2008\) - 'Abuse of cannabis puts 500 a week in hospital'](#)

[NHS Information Centre Hospital Episode Statistics website](#)