



STUDY OF HOSPITAL CARE FOR PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS HIGHLIGHTS CAUSES OF DISCHARGES AGAINST MEDICAL ADVICE

BACKGROUND & METHOD

- While people who inject drugs (PWID) are frequently hospitalized, they are discharged against medical advice more than other populations.
- Discharges from hospital occur when people leave or are removed from hospital before completing treatment, and increase the risk of hospital readmission, longer stays, and death.
- This study was undertaken to explore the factors that lead to discharges against medical advice among PWID.
- In-depth interviews were conducted with 30 PWID who had been discharged from hospital against medical advice within the past two years.

QUICK FACT

PWID ARE OFTEN DISCHARGED AGAINST MEDICAL ADVICE.

FINDINGS

- Study participants experienced severe pain and discomfort while hospitalized due to poor pain and withdrawal management.
- Participants injected drugs to manage pain and withdrawal, but found it difficult to follow harm reduction practices due to surveillance by hospital staff.
- Many participants were involuntarily discharged for not following abstinence-based drug policies, while others left hospital to avoid being caught.

IMPLICATIONS

- Current policies and practices in hospitals may produce suffering and discharges against medical advice among PWID.
- This study highlights the need for evidence-based pain management practices supplemented by harm reduction approaches in hospitals.

McNeil R, Small W, Wood E, Kerr T. **Hospitals as a 'risk environment': An ethno-epidemiological study of voluntary and involuntary discharge from hospital against medical advice among people who inject drugs.** *Social Science & Medicine*, 2014; 105C: 59-66.

