What happens to college students who seek on-campus emergency medical services?

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In 2020, an estimated 13.2% of all emergency services (ES) visits were by individuals aged 15-24. Although ES utilization is well documented in this age group, a comprehensive description of utilization by college students is not present in the literature. Studies focused on college student ES visits are sparse and focus only on particular diagnostic categories, like alcohol use or mental health. At the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, students have high proximity access to both the on-campus clinic and the University Medical Center, containing three Emergency Services (Children’s, Adult, and Psychiatric). This study, using student ES visits from the ES departments (all less than a mile from most on-campus residences), aims to describe how students get to ES, time of arrival, length of stay, and disposition at the end of the visit. Findings from this study summarizing ES access patterns by college students will inform on-campus health service offerings.

Methodology

A retrospective study of 3,817 student visits to ES was conducted between August 29, 2021 and April 30, 2022. A University roster was used to confirm student status and individuals not on the student roster were excluded. Information about arrival time, length of stay in hours, mode of arrival to the ED, disposition at the end of the visit, and ICD-10 diagnosis code were extracted from the electronic medical record system. ICD-10 codes were matched with clinical classification groupings from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality to determine diagnosis chapter and category.

Results (n=3,817)

The top 3 most common diagnostic categories for admissions were depressive disorders, suicidal ideation/attemp/intentional self-harm, and appendicitis.

Conclusions

- The majority of students arrived via walk-in, and students who arrived via police had higher rates of admission than students who arrive by other methods.
- Length of stay varies by diagnostic chapter and is highest for mental health visits.
- The majority of students arrived at ES after on-campus clinic hours with peak arrival times between 12pm and 12am.
- Most student visits ended in discharge. 7% of students were admitted, which is lower than the national estimate in 2020 of 16.3%.
- Understanding how students arrive, when students arrive, how long students stay, and disposition of students’ stays can help inform on-campus clinic operations and campus health initiatives.

References