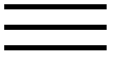


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Project ASSERT: An ED-Based Intervention to Increase Access to Primary Care, Preventive Services, and the Substance Abuse Treatment System

Edward Bernstein MD ... Suzette Levenson MPH

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Abstract

Study objective: To test the feasibility and effectiveness of Project ASSERT, an innovative program developed by us to facilitate access to the substance abuse treatment system and to primary care and preventive services for emergency department patients with drug- and alcohol-related health problems. **Methods:** Multicultural health promotion advocates (HPAs) were trained by ED personnel to screen patients using a health needs history, to administer a brief negotiated interview based on readiness-to-change principles, and to use an active referral process to capture the marginal capacity of the substance abuse treatment system. Outcome measures

included (1) number of referrals to the substance abuse treatment system, (2) patient self-report of satisfaction with services received from Project ASSERT and utilization of treatment resources, and (3) changes in self-reported frequency of drug and alcohol use and in Drug Abuse Screening Test scores between enrollment and follow-up at 60 to 90 days. **Results:** Between March 1, 1995, and February 29, 1996, 7,118 adult ED patients were screened. Substance abuse was detected among 2,931 patients (41%), and 1,096 (37% of detected patients) were enrolled. A total of 8,848 referrals were made: 3,189 to primary care, 2,018 to a variety of substance abuse treatment services, 2,253 for smoking cessation, 339 for mammography, and 689 to other support services (eg, psychiatric nurse, social worker, battered women's advocate or shelter). Comparison of enrollment and follow-up scores for the 245 enrollees who kept a follow-up appointment demonstrated significant reductions, including a 45% reduction in severity of drug problem, a 56% reduction in alcohol use, and a 64% reduction in the frequency of drinking six or more drinks at one sitting. At follow-up, patients expressed satisfaction with Project ASSERT: 91% were satisfied with their referrals; 93% thought the HPAs explained things well; and 99% thought the HPAs respected them as individuals. Among the follow-up group, 50% self-reported that they had kept an appointment for treatment. **Conclusion:** Project ASSERT is an innovative approach to link ED patients with the substance abuse treatment system and with primary care and other preventive services. Its success is further demonstrated by its adoption by Boston Medical Center as a funded ED value-added service. [Bernstein E, Bernstein J, Levenson S: Project ASSERT: An ED-based intervention to increase access to primary care, preventive services, and the substance abuse treatment system. *Ann Emerg Med* August 1997;30:181-189.]



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† From the Department of Emergency Medicine, Boston University School of Medicine,* and Boston University School of Public Health,† Boston, MA; and Heller School, Brandeis University, Waltham,‡ MA.

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... **Address for reprints:** Edward Bernstein, MD, Department of Emergency Medicine, Boston University, 1 Boston Medical Center Place, Boston, Massachusetts 02118-2393, 617-534-3453, Fax 617-630-9923, E-mail ebernste@bu.edu

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