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Citation

Authors' objectives
Alcohol and drug abuse comprise one of the greatest public health problems. Drug abuse is less common, but has major medical consequences for the user. The social and legal implications are substantial. This report presents a critical review of the scientific literature concerning the treatment of withdrawal, prolonged withdrawal, treatment aimed at preventing relapse, psychological and social therapy to reduce the rate of relapse, treatment programs, the role of institutional care, and the treatment of substance abuse during pregnancy.

Authors' conclusions
Alcohol-related injury can be prevented: Most physicians and nurses meet patients who consume hazardous levels of alcohol. Well-documented scientific studies show that 'mini-intervention' -based on identifying hazardous consumption and providing information, motivation, and support - leads to a reduction in alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems.

This simple but effective method to prevent the physical and psychological damage caused by alcohol is, however, not used to the extent possible.

Effective methods are available to treat abuse and dependence on alcohol and drugs: Many specific psychosocial treatment methods and pharmaceuticals have been scientifically documented as effective means to treat abuse and dependence on alcohol and drugs. Several other methods currently used to treat alcohol and drug abuse and dependence have no documented effects, or are shown to be ineffective in scientific studies.

Consequently, care for substance abuse can be improved by: (a) shifting resources away from ineffective treatment methods and into treatment methods that have been documented as effective and (b) committing more resources to treatment programs that apply evidence-based methods.

Information, education, and research are needed: Programs to treat substance abuse should rest on a foundation of evidence-based knowledge. This requires a commitment to information, education, and research. Informational and educational efforts should encompass the findings presented in this report and should be pursued by all appropriate healthcare and social service providers in the public and private sectors.

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