Interventions for alcohol and drug problems in outpatient settings: a systematic review

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CRD summary
This review found that further research was needed to investigate interventions for drug and alcohol abuse, identified in hospital out-patient settings.

Objectives
To assess interventions for drug and alcohol abuse in hospital out-patient settings.

Review methods
Thirteen databases, including MEDLINE, EMBASE, and DARE, were searched for published or unpublished studies, in any language, up to August, 2011. Reference lists of included studies were handsearched.

The review included randomised and non-randomised controlled trials of any intervention for adults with alcohol or drug problems that were identified in out-patient settings, other than addiction or psychiatric units. Trials had to assess people attending hospital as out-patients for any reason other than treatment for substance abuse. Outcomes could include alcohol or drug use, quality of life, and criminal offences, among others.

Two reviewers independently searched for articles. One reviewer extracted the data and assessed quality, and another checked both, with disagreements resolved by a third reviewer, if necessary. A narrative synthesis was reported.

Results of the review
Seven trials were included, with 2,709 participants. Five trials assessed alcohol, one assessed drugs, and one assessed both.

There was evidence to suggest that interventions based on motivational techniques could be effective for alcohol misuse identified in oral-maxillofacial clinics, but not in general out-patient departments. The evidence was insufficient to draw conclusions on the effectiveness of interventions for drug misuse, and for drug and alcohol misuse, identified in out-patient settings.

Conclusions
Further research was needed to clarify the type of intervention that would be effective for problems identified in out-patient settings.

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This is a high quality systematic review involving CRD that meets the criteria for inclusion on DARE. As CRD reviews are of high quality this structured abstract presents a brief summary of the review methods, the results and conclusions.