

Hospitalisation following residential drug and alcohol treatment for young people with and without a history of criminal conviction

TYSON WHITTEN^{1,2}, JESSE CALE³, SALLY NATHAN⁴, SARITA BISTA⁵, MARK FERRY⁶, MEGAN WILLIAMS⁷, PATRICK RAWSTORN⁴, ANDREW HAYEN⁵

¹*School of Social Sciences, University of Adelaide, Adelaide, South Australia, Australia;*

²*School of Psychiatry, University of New South Wales, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia;*

³*School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Griffith University, Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia;*

⁴*School of Population Health, University of New South Wales, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia;*

⁵*School of Public Health, University of Technology Sydney, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia;*

⁶*Ted Noffs Foundation, Randwick, New South Wales, Australia;*

⁷*National Centre for Cultural Competence and Sydney Institute of Criminology, University of Sydney, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia*

Presenter's email: tyson.whitten@adelaide.edu.au

Introduction and Aims: Adolescents who engage in both substance abuse and crime have a greater risk of adverse health events than those who engage in substance abuse alone. This study examines the short and long-term effect of adolescent engagement in a residential substance abuse treatment program on subsequent hospitalisations for all clients, and separately for those with and without a history of criminal conviction.

Design and Methods: Data includes linked administrative records of clients referred to the Program for Adolescent Life Management (PALM) from January 2001 to December 2016 in New South Wales, Australia (n=3059). Post-treatment hospitalisation outcomes were designated as either physical injury, mental health problem, or organic illness. Treatment and control groups were matched on factors associated with program retention. Logistic and cox regression analyses examined the odds and rate of hospitalisation within one year, and up to 15 years, post-treatment for all clients, and stratified by prior conviction status.

Results: Treatment was associated with significantly lower likelihood of hospitalisation for all outcomes within one year and up to 15 years post-treatment. Reductions in the odds and rate of hospitalisation for physical injury and mental health problem were larger for young people with a prior criminal conviction. There was an interaction between treatment and prior conviction on short-term hospitalisation for physical injury.

Conclusions: Adolescents who engage in a residential drug and alcohol program appear to have a long-lasting reduction in the risk of hospitalisation. This also appears to apply to those with a history of criminal conviction.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Residential drug and alcohol treatment programs, like PALM, may be a useful public health strategy to help reduce the burden of disease among adolescents with substance abuse problems, and including those who may be involved with the criminal justice system.

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