



From Dr A Majid Katme

## Two million trips to A&E every year blamed on alcohol-related illness and injury

Almost two million visits to A&E could be due to alcohol-related illness and injury, claim researchers.

They say at least one in three patients seen in emergency departments because of drink then have to be admitted to hospital for further treatment.

The study gives a glimpse into the cost and damage to the NHS caused by binge-drinking. The Health Service does not collect data on alcohol-related A&E admissions.



Almost two million trips to A&E each year are caused by alcohol, according to a study

The research looked at adults seeking emergency care at Bristol Royal Infirmary over four weeks. Some 774 patients were asked questions about their reasons for attending A&E and their average weekly alcohol consumption.

Doctors were also asked whether the emergency was directly or indirectly related to alcohol, or was unrelated.

Around one in five patients said they had drunk alcohol before coming to A&E while 14 per cent felt their injury was related to drink.

Of these, around half – 50 patients – believed they had been injured by someone who had been drinking, while a similar proportion had consumed more than the maximum recommended weekly units.

Of the 111 patients who felt their attendance was related to alcohol, one in three was then admitted to hospital, the Emergency Medicine journal reports. Doctors said around one in five visits was related to alcohol, with one in ten blaming their visit on drink-related violence.



Up to 640,000 hospital admissions each year are believed to relate to drinking

Based on the findings, the researchers estimate alcohol may be involved in up to 640,000 hospital admissions and nearly two million visits to A&E in England and Wales each year.

Figures from the NHS Information Centre earlier this month show there were 1,168,000 patients admitted to hospital as a result of alcohol last year – up 11 per cent since 2010.

Experts say the total cost of alcohol to the NHS exceeds £3billion a year.

Consultant nurse Rebecca Hoskins, who headed the team, said a significant proportion of those needing help were young binge-drinkers.

'We find that weekend drinking now extends from Thursday to Sunday, and people drink more when there is a special occasion,' she added.

Emily Robinson, of Alcohol Concern, said: 'Alcohol-related hospital admissions remain extremely high. 'This study provides a worrying insight into the burden put on to emergency medical services by those who have been drinking.

'While the Government has shown a will to tackle these problems, it must make sure that its policies are backed by resources to make a difference.'

Gavin Partington, interim chief executive at the Wine and Spirit Trade Association, said he was concerned the study's findings from one hospital were being extrapolated to the whole of the NHS.

He said 'It is accepted that we need a more robust way of calculating the impact of alcohol on the NHS and there is currently a review underway.

'The national data that is available suggests primary diagnoses of alcohol-related disease has gone down, which is encouraging, against an overall picture of declining alcohol consumption since 2004.'