Addicts in Treatment Have Less Access to HIV and STI Testing

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The rise of for-profit opioid treatment programs over nonprofit or publicly funded centers appears to have led to a drop in the proportion of programs offering testing for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV, although hepatitis C virus (HCV) testing availability remains constant overall, MedPage Today reports. This shift comes despite the 2006 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendation for routine HIV testing in health care establishments. Publishing their findings in a research letter in The Journal of the American Medical Association, researchers analyzed data from the National Survey of Substance Abuse Treatment Services, which is conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

There were 849 opioid treatment programs at the beginning of the study period, in 2000, and 1,175 at the end, in 2011. Together these programs treat more than 300,000 addicts. Throughout the same period, the proportion of for-profit programs rose from 43 percent to 54 percent, the proportion of nonprofits dropped from 43 percent to 36 percent, and government-funded programs fell from 14 percent to 10 percent of the total.

While the number of programs offering HIV, STI and hep C testing increased overall between 2000 and 2011, the percentage offering HIV and STI testing dropped by a respective 18 and 13 percent.

Government-funded programs offered testing for HIV, STIs and hep C at a rate exceeding 75 percent throughout the study period. But HIV testing availability dropped by 20 percent in for-profit programs and 11 percent in the nonprofits. There was a 23 percent drop in availability of STI testing in for-profit programs while the proportion in nonprofits remained stable. The for-profit programs saw a 13 percent drop in hep C testing while the proportion rose 14 percent at the nonprofits.

To read the study abstract, click here.

To read the MedPage Today story, click here.

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