

Press Release

New study profiles women's use of health care

A new report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) examines women's use of ambulatory medical care in 1997 and 1998 and finds that in many significant ways their care differs from men. Even excluding pregnancy-related visits, women were 33 percent more likely than men to visit a doctor, although this difference decreased with age. The rate of doctor visits for such reasons as annual examinations and preventive services was 100 percent higher for women than for men and medication patterns differed significantly. Women were not only more likely to receive hormones, but also dramatically more likely to have an antidepressant prescribed.

"Any effort to improve the health and well being of our families must have women's health as a vital component," Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy G. Thompson said. "In order to fully deal with any health problem, we have to look at how it affects everyone who suffers from it - not just one gender, race or ethnic group, but all of us."

"Utilization of Ambulatory Medical Care by Women: United States, 1997-98" from CDC's National Center for Health Statistics, describes the 500 million ambulatory medical care visits to doctors' offices and hospital outpatient and emergency departments made each year by women 15 years of age and older. The report covers patient characteristics such as age, race and insurance coverage and health care provider characteristics, including place and type of care.

"It's important to understand the way women use health care in America," said Yvonne Green, Director of CDC's Office of Women's Health, "so that health care providers can be prepared and programs developed to meet women's special health care needs."

Among the highlights of the report:

- On average, women made about 4.6 visits a year in 1997-98, ranging from 3.8 for those 15-44 to about double that for those 65 and older.
- Visits by younger women were more likely to be to primary care physicians and emergency departments while older women were more likely to see specialists.
- Compared with white women, black women had higher rates of visits for hypertension, complications of pregnancy, and diabetes.
- More than four out of five ambulatory medical care visits were made to office-based physicians; the rest were about equally divided between hospital outpatient and emergency departments.
- The most common diagnostic or screening service for women was blood pressure screening performed in over half of all visits. Pelvic exams were performed during about 14 percent of the visits and urinalysis in about the same

number of visits. The rate of mammography was about 29 percent lower for women 65 and over than for women 45-64 years of age.

- Among the major classes of drugs, those most frequently prescribed for women were for the cardiovascular-renal and central nervous systems, as well as hormones. The specific therapeutic classes most frequently prescribed were nonnarcotic analgesics, antidepressants, and estrogen/progestin.
- The most frequent sources of payment for ambulatory care visits by women were private insurance (50 percent), Medicare (22 percent), and Medicaid (9 percent). The proportion of visits covered by private insurance was 1.3 times as high among white women as among black women. In contrast, the proportion of ambulatory visits by black women covered by Medicaid was more than three times as high as the proportion of Medicaid visits by white women.

CDC conducts annual surveys of physician visits to office-based practices and to hospital outpatient and emergency departments, as part of its National Health Care Survey which also covers hospitals, nursing homes, hospices and home health care. For more information about the survey and to view or download the report visit the website at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs>.

CDC protects people's health and safety by preventing and controlling diseases and injuries; enhances health decisions by providing credible information on critical health issues; and promotes healthy living through strong partnerships with local, national and international organizations.