2003 to 2015 saw increase in outpatient benzodiazepine use

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(HealthDay)—Outpatient benzodiazepine use increased from 2003 to

2015, according to a study published online Jan. 25 in *JAMA Network Open*.

Sumit D. Agarwal, M.D., and Bruce E. Landon, M.D., from Harvard Medical School in Boston, quantified patterns in outpatient benzodiazepine prescribing and compared them across specialties and indications using nationally representative National Ambulatory Medical Care Survey data. The yearly population-based sample of outpatient visits among adults was analyzed and ranged from 20,884 visits in 2003 to 24,273 visits in 2015.

The researchers identified 919 benzodiazepine visits in 2003 and 1,672 in 2015, nationally representing 27.6 and 62.6 million visits, respectively. There was an increase in benzodiazepine visits from 3.8 to 7.4 percent. There was no change in the benzodiazepine visit rate to psychiatrists (29.6 percent in 2003 and 30.2 percent in 2015); the rate increased among all other physicians, including primary care physicians (3.6 to 7.5 percent). There was a fourfold increase in the rate of coprescribing of benzodiazepines with opioids, from 0.5 percent in 2003 to 2.0 percent in 2015; the coprescribing rate with other sedating medications increased from 0.7 to 1.5 percent.

"As we have seen with the opioid epidemic and in light of increasing death rates related to benzodiazepine overdose, addressing prescribing patterns may help curb the growing use of benzodiazepines," the authors write.

More information: Abstract/Full Text

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