

Can Doctors Curb Children's Drug Use?



A government panel said this week there is insufficient evidence about the best way for doctors to persuade children and teens not to use drugs.

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, which issues guidelines for doctors, said they did not find enough reliable studies to base recommendations on, *NPR* reports.

They reviewed studies on brief counseling sessions during an office visit, which is sometimes combined with computer-based screening. They also looked at studies of computer-based programs that children or teens access at home.

In the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, the panel concluded, "Studies on these interventions were limited and the findings on whether interventions significantly improved health outcomes were inconsistent."

According to Carrie Patnode of Kaiser Permanente Center for Health Research, who led the review of evidence, doctors may still want to screen their young patients for substance abuse. Currently, fewer than half of pediatricians do so, she said.

In a statement, panel member Susan Curry said, "When there is a lack of evidence, doctors must use their clinical experience and judgment, and many clinicians may choose to talk with an adolescent to prevent or discourage risky behaviors, such as drug use."

In 2011, the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a policy statement that said doctors should routinely screen their teenage patients for drug and alcohol use at every visit, and look for signs of dependence or addiction.