Demand for Addiction Services Could Double in 2014

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A surge in the number of drug and alcohol addiction patients could soon overwhelm doctors as the Affordable Care Act (a.k.a. the health care reform law, or ACA) is fully implemented, The Associated Press reports. In 2014, between 3 million and 5 million addicts will become eligible for insurance coverage. The ACA will designate substance abuse treatment as an “essential health benefit” under Medicare and most commercial insurance plans. Policy analysts predict the number of patients enrolled in these programs to double as a result. Currently, only one cent out of every dollar in the U.S. health care system goes to treating addiction, and in more than two-thirds of states considering Medicaid expansion, treatment clinics are at or near full capacity. Many substance abuse centers in the system are publicly funded, run by medically inexperienced counselors and have been shrinking as a result of federal budget cuts. Experts said treatment programs and medical colleges will face mounting pressure to create a larger addiction treatment system.

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