

## ER Data as a Source to Monitor the Health of a Community

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*Abstract:* Public Health has a long history of tracking and leading efforts to control infectious disease. Policies of mandatory reporting and the authority to intervene in cases of infectious disease have made this possible. However, advances in medicine and improvements in living conditions have decreased the occurrence of and improved the health outcomes of infectious disease. Chronic conditions have now surpassed infectious disease as the leading causes of illness.

In Washington State, death records, inpatient hospitalization data, and population based surveys are available to monitor the health status of residents. These resources provide information on severe health issues or information on the prevalence of a limited number of health issues. Less severe illnesses and injuries impact the quality of life of an individual and require support from the medical community. Emergency room (ER) data enables examination of 1- health issues that are not severe enough to require hospitalization, and 2- use patterns of the ER.

In an effort to monitor the health status of the community, Spokane Regional Health District completed a process to acquire ER visit data. This data supplements existing data sources to provide a more complete picture of health issues in the community. The information can be used by programs working on specific health issues, such as injuries or suicide; to determine health issues of a specific population, such as pregnant women or children; and to evaluate use of medical services, such as insurance status among visits or conditions that are manageable by a primary care provider like diabetes. The process for gaining access to ER records, challenges of working with the records, and findings from the records will be presented.