

subsequent savings, particularly among those under 45.

Another study, by Holder and J. B. Halan, of public employees in California, yielded similar findings, and a 5-year follow-up of 90 families of alcoholics showed a reduction in monthly medical expenditures of \$72 per person, bringing them to the same level as a comparison group of nonalcoholic families. A 1978 study of health maintenance organizations, done by the Group Health Association of America, found a 40% reduction in outpatient medical visits by alcoholics 4 years after treatment.

Of particular current interest is a 4-year study being conducted by NIAAA and the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) to determine whether the inpatient alcoholism treatment supplied under Medicare and Medicaid reduces subsequent health care costs. This is the largest cost offset study to date, covering about 8500 alcoholics in six states. Most data have not yet been analyzed, but Paul Lichtenstein of HCFA reported that among New Jersey Medicaid patients, "total health care costs were significantly reduced after treatment." About 44% of the group underwent detoxification only and 23% of the group were readmitted within the year. Among the rest, however, health costs had come down to the level of the control group after 2 years.

A great debate has long raged in alcoholism treatment circles over the cost-effectiveness of inpatient treatment and whether, and for whom, it is preferable to outpatient detoxification as well as rehabilitation. In its extreme form, the debate is between the medical model and the "social recovery model" of rehabilitation. The latter, heavily based on the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous, emphasizes mutual self-help in residential or walk-in settings and entails no medical treatment for detoxification in the vast majority of cases (medical problems are referred to appropriate providers).

The social model, which prevails in California, is gaining increasing attention not only because of the much reduced costs, but also because there is no persuasive evidence that the setting has any differential effect on patient outcomes. Robert I. Reynolds, administrator of the San Diego County program, reported, for example, that in contrast to inpatient rehabilitation, which costs \$400 a day, the social recovery program costs \$53 a day for detoxification in a residential setting and \$33 for "primary recovery services." Al Wright of the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services said that a 42-bed county program costing \$1.4 million had been shut down and the money was instead going to support eight nonmedical residential programs with 140 beds.

Many speakers expressed dissatisfaction with the high costs of inpatient programs, whose superiority have not been demonstrated, but which are becoming increasingly elaborate as droves of for-profit institutions have entered the alcoholism rehabilitation industry. Treatment costs would probably be offset far earlier if more carriers shifted the focus of coverage to outpatient services (those that cover rehabilitation are locked into the 28-day inpatient rehabilitation model). But research is still inadequate as a guide to future directions—existing studies tend to be too small, to lack control populations, and to have unrealistically short follow-up periods.

Gordis pointed out that effective treatment of alcoholism is still being inhibited at

many levels by the stigma attached the disorder—in the demands for cost-benefit studies (which he said are more stringent than those generally required for purely medical problems), in failure to recognize the disease in medical patients, failure to refer recognized cases, and in the "skepticism many have about the efficacy of alcoholism treatment." He said a more sophisticated level of research is required to help identify subsets of alcoholics and match them with appropriate treatments. All we know for sure at this point, he said, is that "treatment of some sort is far better than doing nothing at all." ■ **CONSTANCE HOLDEN**

A second article will discuss research on the treatment of alcoholism.

Soviets Interested in Study on Economic Conversion

In 1984 the U.S.-U.S.S.R. Symposium on Conversion from Military to Civilian Economy met for the first time in Moscow. Tensions between the United States and the U.S.S.R. were running high then, and the Soviet government was undergoing internal change. Thus, there was no strong commitment on the part of Soviet officials to study ways of rolling back defense spending, related shifts in the two nations' economies, and planning needs for economic conversion. The symposium, an outgrowth of discussions initiated by American economist Seymour Melman in the early 1980s, subsequently fell dormant after the first meeting.

But now, Melman reports that there is renewed support in the Soviet Union for exploring economic conversion concepts. The Columbia University professor was in Moscow earlier this month to attend the International Forum for a Nuclear-Free World, For the Survival of Humanity. The event provided him with the opportunity to press Soviet officials to start a new U.S.-U.S.S.R. study effort on economic conversion. Georgy Arbatov, head of the Soviet's Institute of the USA and Canada, and officials of the State Planning Committee "have been strongly supportive of the idea," says Melman. "I have never before encountered this level of support for this line of work."

The heightened interest in shrinking the military-industrial complexes of the United States and U.S.S.R. Melman contends, stems from General Secretary Mikhail S. Gorbachev's goal of overhauling the U.S.S.R.'s economy. Melman left the Soviet

Union on 17 February with the impression that demilitarization is an "indispensable part" of the government's plan for economic reconstruction.

Soviet interest in taking up the economic problem again was conveyed to Melman in recent meetings that included Yeugeny Primakov of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Deputy Foreign Minister Michael Petrovski, Vadim Kirichenko of the Economic Research Institute, and Arbatov. Melman predicts that discussions will begin within a year, but first an agenda for research and discussion must be worked out. The symposium likely will be sponsored by the American Council of Learned Societies and the Soviet Academy of Sciences.

Melman says he has discussed his activities with members of Congress. The Executive Branch, however, has not been briefed on his activities, he adds, because it has "shown no interest in the economic conversion perspective." Indeed, the idea would appear to run counter to the Reagan Administration's strong defense posture.

Since the mid-1960s, Melman has argued in numerous papers and books, including *Our Depleted Society* and *The Permanent War Economy*, that high defense expenditures have contributed to the erosion of industrial competence in the United States. He has called for a conversion from a military to a civilian economy. But, he notes that every president since John F. Kennedy has "followed the lead of the Pentagon in opposing such legislation." ■ **MARK CRAWFORD**