



The Royal Australasian
College of Physicians



Media Release

Northern Territory, Friday 13 November 2015

For immediate release

Road toll: counting the human cost of speed

This Sunday is the World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims.

In the Northern Territory, doctors from the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine (ACEM), the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) and the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) will be reflecting on the numerous patients they have treated in the aftermath of road accidents. They'll be thinking of the ones who lived, and the ones who died.

The difference is often speed.

“Every high speed traffic accident could be mitigated or even avoided if the vehicle was travelling at lower speeds,” said Dr Stephen Gourley, Director of Emergency Medicine at the Alice Springs Hospital. “That’s why having an open speed limit – like the one currently in place on the Stuart Highway – is dangerous.”

The open speed limit zone, which was introduced in February 2014 on a 200km stretch of the Stuart Highway and subsequently expanded, goes against international trends.

“Around the world we’re seeing governments moving away from open speed limit zones because the evidence has repeatedly shown that speed is linked with car crashes, deaths and injuries,” said Dr Christine Connors, Chair of the NT Committee of the RACP. “Research shows that just a 5 per cent increase in speed leads to a 15 per cent increase in serious injury crashes and a 22 per cent increase in fatal crashes.”

Dr David Read, NT representative of RACS Trauma Committee, said Territory road users are particularly vulnerable to the risks posed by open speed limits.

“In the NT there are long distances between emergency services and medical care,” Dr Read said, “Roads are almost always single lane, unseparated and often unsealed; there are also wandering livestock and wildlife.”

The number of fatalities on Northern Territory roads in 2014 was three times higher than the Australian national average, Dr Read added.

This weekend these doctors will join together with colleagues in Australasia and around the world, as well as the families and friends of road traffic victims, to remember the many thousands of people killed globally in traffic accidents.

All three medical colleges have called on the Northern Territory government to put the safety of road users first and abolish open speed limits for good.

It’s time to halt the number of deaths and injuries on NT roads.

[‘Over a dozen times’](#) – [read Dr Stephen Gourley’s story](#) about the night he had to treat the victims of a high speed traffic accident that left two people dead.

[‘One crash: five families’](#) – Dr Didier Palmer [writes about a 180km crash](#) that happened outside Darwin only last month.

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The Australasian College for Emergency Medicine (ACEM)www.acem.org.au/

ACEM is a not-for-profit organisation responsible for the training and ongoing education of emergency physicians, and for the advancement of professional standards in emergency medicine, in Australia and New Zealand. ACEM, as the peak professional organisation for emergency medicine in Australasia, has a vital interest in ensuring that the highest patient care and emergency department standards.

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