
ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

MEDIA RELEASE



Alcohol and Trauma – hot topics for surgeons gathering in Darwin

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The Provincial Surgeons of Australia together with the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) Indigenous Health and Trauma Committees have joined forces at a tripartite event in Darwin for an in depth review of injury in rural and remote areas, including Indigenous injury.

Leading trauma surgeons in Darwin are concerned with the latest road fatality statistics putting the Northern Territory the highest in Australia at 17.31 deaths per 100,000 people compared with 5.04 for the rest of Australia.

The Territory also holds the highest percentage of unsafe roads in the nation, according to the Australia Road Assessment Program. These statistics are certain to be hot topics for discussion during the series of meetings, conferences and workshops that make up the 50th Annual Scientific Conference.

Transporting rural and remote trauma victims to definitive care is another challenge that concerns trauma surgeons. It can take hours to move a road trauma victim to the major trauma hospital from a remote area, compared to their city counterparts.

Trauma surgeons say they want to see improved transportation times and best-practice pre-hospital care, to ensure these patients have the best possible chance of surviving.

David Read, Director of Trauma Royal Darwin Hospital said: "In the NT we have three times the national average of road fatalities."

"Low use of seat belts, alcohol, speed and the quality of roads are all major factors," Dr Read said.

Also on the agenda is a growing movement for stronger policies around alcohol-related violence and injury based on Hours, Outlets and Taxes (HOT), an important advocacy issue for the RACS Trauma Committee and the College as a whole.

Alcohol usage in road deaths in the Northern Territory is reported to be significantly higher than for the rest of Australia.

Chair of the RACS Trauma Committee, Mr John Crozier has seen the effect of such policies in Newcastle and more recently in Sydney's King's Cross.

"As a trauma surgeon I see the tragic outcomes on Saturday nights in Emergency Rooms with an alcohol-saturated culture that is becoming all too familiar," Mr Crozier said.

"There is growing evidence that addressing the hours venues are open, the available outlets that sell alcohol and the taxes we place on it, can have an effect.

"This is a great opportunity for peers to gather and discuss further solutions to these problems – and investigate ways these initiatives can be incorporated into the Top End," Mr Crozier said.

The conference runs until Saturday 23 August at the Darwin Convention Centre.

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