Dog bite injuries an increasing burden for New Zealand

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Injuries caused by dog bites are an escalating problem for New Zealand, delegates to the 84th Annual Scientific Congress of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons have been told.

A study conducted by Dr Olivia Hill, a former plastics registrar at Wellington Hospital, has shown that the prevalence of dog bite injuries at the Wellington Regional Plastics Unit is steadily growing, a problem which is reflected right across New Zealand.

“In 2004, Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) data identified dog bite injuries as a major cost to both ACC and the taxpayer.

“Our research has shown that in the ten years since this study, the number of cases per year has continued to rise and this is placing a considerable resource strain on our hospitals,” Dr Hill said.

According to Dr Hill’s research, half of all dog bite wounds were inflicted to the face, although the site of injury was closely associated with the age of the patient.

“Over a third of presentations are children under the age of ten, a trend that we are seeing nation-wide. Unfortunately, as these children are lower to the ground, they are much more likely to be bitten on the head and neck region.

“It is much more common for adults to sustain bites to the limbs, usually on the arm, and usually as a result of trying to break up a dog fight. More education needs to be directed at children and safety in handling dog fights,” Dr Hill said.

Dr Hill presented her research at the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) Annual Scientific Congress, which is being held between 4 – 8 May in Perth.

Over a thousand surgeons from the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) as well as international surgeons from the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh are gathering at the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre this week for a series of workshops, discussions, Plenaries and masterclasses across a broad range of surgical issues.

The conference brings together the top surgical and medical minds from across New Zealand, Australia and the rest of the world and also pays tribute to the centenary of Gallipoli by analysing ethics and developments in surgery over the past 100 years, in war and peace time, as well as exploring what the future may hold in surgical progress.

About the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS)

RACS is the leading advocate for surgical standards, professionalism and surgical education in Australia and New Zealand. The College is a not-for-profit organisation that represents more than 7000 surgeons and 1300 surgical trainees and International Medical Graduates. RACS also supports healthcare and surgical education in the Asia-Pacific region and is a substantial funder of surgical research. There are nine surgical specialties in Australasia being: Cardiothoracic surgery, General surgery, Neurosurgery, Orthopaedic surgery, Otolaryngology Head-and-Neck surgery, Paediatric surgery, Plastic and Reconstructive surgery, Urology and Vascular surgery.

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