



ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

MEDIA RELEASE

Road safety: The Australian contribution

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Delegates to the 80th Annual Scientific Congress (ASC) of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons have been told that while Australia has led the way in the fight against road trauma, more still needs to be done.

Associate Professor John Hart, of Monash University's Department of Surgery, told delegates that between 1950 and 1970 road fatalities in Australia increased from 1643 to 3798. The deaths of 963 Victorians in 1967 prompted the Victorian Parliament to establish a committee on road safety to implement the compulsory usage of seat belts. When this measure, which met with stern resistance from some community groups, was finally enacted in 1971 after the road toll reached 1034 in 1970, it was a world first. It resulted in a 20 per cent reduction in road fatalities and serious injuries.

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons had established a Road Trauma Committee in 1969 which played an important role in this initiative, as well as advocating successfully for measures to address the problems of drink driving and speeding.

"As well as trying to minimise the incidence of road trauma, the College recognised the importance of improving the management of road trauma victims," Professor Hart said. "Early Management of Severe Trauma (EMST) courses were introduced, as was improved data collection in hospitals. These initiatives had a dramatic effect in further reducing fatalities and improving outcomes."

"More recently, the introduction of compulsory bicycle helmet use has reduced the incidence of head injuries on our roads.

"It should be a source of great satisfaction that road fatalities in Australia fell by 49 per cent between 1960 and 1994, despite a rising population and increased vehicle registration," Professor Hart said.

"There is now a multidisciplinary approach to the problem, incorporating input from government and professional bodies, and an emphasis on education and verification programs.

"But despite these achievements, much work needs to be done to improve compliance with existing programs, to develop new programs and to improve trauma management."

Professor Hart's presentation is one of hundreds at this year's ASC, covering all surgical specialties and aspects of surgical history and education. Nearly 2,000 delegates are expected to attend the ASC, which runs from 2 to 6 May and is being held at the Adelaide Convention Centre. The ASC program is available online at www.surgeons.org

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