

Skatepark injuries can incur economic pain

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Anyone heading out to the local skatepark with dreams of becoming the next Tony Hawk may want to take some precautions.

Researchers from the Center for Trauma and Injury Prevention at the University of California, Irvine have found that the economic aches attached to a skatepark-related injury can be as great as the physical pains.

Dr. Federico Vaca and colleagues tracked emergency room patients at UC Irvine Medical Center in Orange, Calif., who injured themselves at a nearby skatepark and found that the average cost for each injury was nearly \$3,200. Medical costs comprised two-thirds of this amount, and lost wages accounted for the other third for both patients and their families. The study appears in *Clinical Medicine & Research*.

“With skateboarding’s popularity remaining high, the economic impact of these injuries affects more and more people and their families,” said Vaca, a clinical professor of emergency medicine. “Between 1997 and 2005 across the country, emergency room visits by people with skateboard-related injuries rose from over 48,000 to more than 112,000, and that number continues to rise.”

The researchers found that economic impact was greatest on working adults older than 25, who, on average, missed an average of 17 days of work because of their injuries. Vaca noted that one patient lost his job because he missed too much work. As a result from loss of income, he was evicted from his apartment. Another subject, who tuned guitars and

pianos by trade, suffered a forearm fracture and was fired because he could not work.

“Clearly, for adults who suffer injuries while skateboarding, the economic impact can go significantly beyond the medical costs,” Vaca said.

A little more than half of the patients surveyed were between the ages of 8 and 19. While lost wages weren’t a factor for this group, the impact was felt more on the entire family. In addition to students missing school, parents reported missing work to take their children for follow-up medical care.

For the study, Vaca’s team followed emergency room patients from July 1999 to July 2001, contacting them by telephone one week post-injury and then again at one-, three-, six-, nine- and 12-month intervals to assess follow-up medical care, time lost from work and school for both the subject and parents, and the degrees of self-reported disabilities.

Eighty percent of the 95 participating patients were riding skateboards; the others were using inline skates or motocross bicycles. Ninety-one percent of the injured patients were treated and released the same day; 9 percent were admitted for further care. Fifty-eight percent reported previous injuries from the same activities, and more than 90 percent reported using helmets and knee pads. Seventy-one percent had medical insurance.

Vaca says common skateboard injuries seen in emergency departments are arm and leg fractures, sprains, contusions, and head and stomach injuries.

Source: University of California - Irvine

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