

## Doctors urged to talk to patients about parking cellphones

July 30 2013, by Bryan Alary

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Studies show talking on a cellphone while driving raises the risk of collision by four to six times—comparable to getting behind the wheel while under the influence.

Family physicians regularly counsel patients about medical risks associated with heart disease, stroke, diabetes and smoking, and a team from the University of Alberta wants to add cellphone use and driving to the discussion.

Talking on a cellphone while driving raises the risk of collision by four to six times—comparable to getting behind the wheel while under the influence, studies show. Addressing the problem requires educating the

public about the risks, and a good place to start is in the doctor's office.

"The evidence is clear and compelling. Epidemiologic, driver simulator and naturalistic studies demonstrate that cellphones and driving are a dangerous combination. Unfortunately, while most drivers view cellphone use as driving as unacceptable, many of them still engage in it," writes Victoria K. Lee, a [family medicine](#) resident at the U of A, in a commentary published July 29 in the journal *Canadian Family Physician*.

Lee co-wrote the article with pediatrics resident Chantelle Champagne and Louis Hugo Francescutti, a professor in the School of Public Health and adjunct professor in the Department of Emergency Medicine.

The trio maintains that physicians have a role in educating patients through [open dialogue](#) about their views to see if they're aware of the hazards of talking while behind the wheel. They offer a number of discussion points, from increased odds of a collision to risks associated with talking on a hands-free device (studies show it's just as dangerous), text messaging (collision risk jumps 23 times) and the lack of hard statistics about cellphone-related crashes.

"Once patients are convinced of the risks of cellphone use while driving, help to prevent them from developing the habit or help them change their behaviour," they write, listing the following advice:

- turn off your cellphone when you enter your vehicle or switch it to silent mode and put it somewhere you cannot reach it;
- set up caller ID and a reliable voice mail system that lets callers know you might be driving and will return their call at a later time;
- ask passengers to help by operating cellphones and other electronic

devices. If you are the passenger, speak up and offer to help;

- if you need to make an important call, pull over and park in a safe location before reaching for your cellphone;
- do not call your friends, co-workers, clients, or family when you know they are driving.

The U of A team says driver education, workplace restrictions, new technologies, media attention and legislation can all play a role in changing [cellphone](#) use behaviours, in addition to primary care physicians.

"Patients regard us as community leaders and experts in health and safety. We are in a unique position to influence the thoughts and behaviour of people regarding their overall health and well-being by educating them about the issue of distracted [driving](#)."

Provided by University of Alberta

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