

Injury prevention intervention cuts distracted driving in half, say trauma surgeons

October 28 2014

A simple intervention designed to raise awareness about the use of communication devices while driving reduced the incidence of distracted driving by 50 percent in hospital personnel, according to findings from a single site study presented today at the 2014 Clinical Congress of the American College of Surgeons.

Driving distracted—caused by any activity that steals a driver's attention from the road—is at an all-time high. In 2012, an estimated 421,000 people were injured in accidents involving distracted driving and 3,328 were killed as a result of it, according to the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA).*

"There is no doubt that this activity is a serious danger and one of the largest growing killers in our world," said senior study author Bellal Joseph, MD, FACS, a trauma surgeon and associate professor of surgery at the University of Arizona, Tucson. "People have a lack of insight about the true dangers of texting and driving. They know it's not safe, but they really don't understand the high level of peril it truly represents."

In an effort to identify the incidence of distracted driving among [health care providers](#) at the University of Arizona and to raise awareness about its hazards, study authors conducted a four-phase intervention. The aim was to assess the incidence of distracted driving among health care

personnel and assess the impact of prevention campaign on incidence of distracted driving.

In the first phase, researchers observed the incidence of distracted driving—talking on a cell phone or texting behind the wheel—of hospital employees. To do this, they stationed themselves outside an employee parking garage where nursing staff and doctors exit the hospital. Staff members were identified by the display of car passes, or the wearing of hospital badges, and/or scrubs. Incidence of distracted driving was recorded in three intervals, each day for one week.

The second phase consisted of a survey and a five-point educational intervention. For the survey, hospital employees received a questionnaire about their overall knowledge of distracted driving as well as their driving habits, including whether or not they texted or used a cell phone while driving.

For the intervention, researchers explained to respondents why using handheld devices while driving is dangerous; for instance, using a [cell phone](#) on the road is equivalent to driving with a blood alcohol level of 0.08 percent, or being legally impaired. What's more, five seconds is the average time texting steals a person's attention from the road. When traveling at 55 mph, that's like traveling the length of a football field blindfolded.*

Meanwhile, researchers posted banners in the hospital cafeteria and handed out informational brochures about distracted driving. Afterward, a post-intervention questionnaire was given to survey respondents to find out how many were affected by what they had learned.

For phase three, researchers returned to the hospital parking lot where they once again observed and recorded the driving habits of hospital employees for another week. After six months, respondents were sent a

post intervention follow up survey.

Overall, researchers collected 15,316 observations (pre-intervention: 6,639; post-intervention: 4,220; post-intervention six months: 4,557) and 520 survey responses. The investigators found that 35.5 percent of respondents admitted to driving distracted while 4.5 percent were involved in a wreck because of it. Additionally, 77 percent of respondents felt more informed after the survey and 91 percent said they supported state legislation against distracted driving.

Additionally, the researchers found a 50 percent decrease in distracted driving after the intervention and this reduction held even after six months.

"A lot of people admitted to distracted driving, but the real key is that 60 percent said they would stop using their cell phones after the [intervention](#), 50 percent said they would change their habits and 51 percent said they had a new understanding of how dangerous distracted driving is," Dr. Joseph reported.

Even simple activities such as talking or changing the radio station can pull a driver's attention away from the road long enough to cause a car accident. Data from NHTSA indicate that nearly 80 percent of all motor vehicle accidents involve driver inattention within three seconds of the crash.*

"This study shows that a big part of trauma care is injury prevention. If we don't get out there and educate people and even push for legislation against it, this dangerous trend is going to continue to grow. It's not going to get any better," Dr. Joseph said. "We are looking to start a DADD, doctors against distracted drivers, and initiate a big push for a national outreach campaign against [distracted driving](#)."

More information: *Source: 100-Car Naturalistic Driving Study. National Highway Transportation Safety Administration. Available at: [www.nhtsa.gov/About+NHTSA/Pres ... listic+Driving+Study](http://www.nhtsa.gov/About+NHTSA/Pres...listic+Driving+Study), Accessed October 1, 2014.

Provided by American College of Surgeons

Citation: Injury prevention intervention cuts distracted driving in half, say trauma surgeons (2014, October 28) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-10-injury-intervention-distracted-trauma-surgeons.html>

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