

Road traffic accidents – a cause of death and trauma

EDITORIAL

After having travelled in the world I have noticed that a society can be studied by looking at its road traffic manners. A culture following correct traffic rules and respect between individuals in contrast to recklessness and ego is shown very clearly in the daily traffic. Traffic accidents are killing and injuring a huge number of people in the world. However there are some interesting differences how countries manage this problem. In some countries, especially in Australia, Europe and North America the number of deaths caused by traffic have dramatically decreased from an incidence of 25–30 per 100 000 inhabitants 30–40 years ago to 3–8 per 100 000 inhabitants today in spite of the fact that the number of cars have increased five times over the same period, and traffic is no longer the major cause of deaths or maxillofacial injuries in these countries today. There is evidence that the development of safer vehicles, the use of safety belts, traffic education, and strict legislation has had a dramatic effect in reducing traffic deaths and injuries and that it is possible to change attitudes and behaviour in a society if a systematic approach is taken by a society. These countries have in common that a systematic national approach towards a safer traffic

environment have been taken by their societies over a long period of time. However in many other countries traffic accidents is still the number one killer and the main cause for maxillofacial injuries compared with the situation 30–40 years ago. In many of these countries people never use safety belts, reckless driving and breaking of traffic rules are seen daily without intervention from the society. In some countries there is no traffic education and people do not even have to learn traffic rules and pass an exam before getting their driving licences. These countries face a big challenge in tackling traffic in their societies if the number of deaths and injuries are going to be reduced. One may think that the lack of systematic approach is simply related to the economy of the country. No, the interesting thing is that some of these countries with the worst traffic problems are rich countries, so the lack of change is mainly related to culture and (un-)willingness to tackle these issues.

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