



Research Connections

News and Events in Shriners Hospitals for Children's Research Department

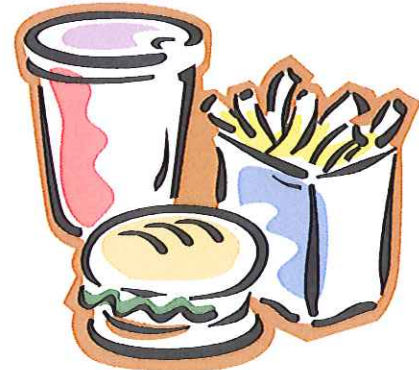
March 2013

Distracted Driving and You

Occasionally, Research will publish newsletters that are designed to be educational in the prevention of serious injury and/or death. This newsletter focuses on one of the most contemporary issues which cause serious injury including spinal cord damage (which compromises the quality of life), loss of limbs, and other musculoskeletal injuries and death. More importantly, it is completely preventable.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 3100 people were killed and another 416,000 injured nationwide in 2010 directly related to distracted driving/drivers. While many believe that distracted driving simply means using a cell phone while driving, it actually means any accident-causing distraction such as talking to passengers or children in the back seat, manipulating dashboard controls, smoking and eating. Some individuals have even been observed applying makeup or reading while operating a motor vehicle.

According to retired Army Major General Kevin Bergner, president of USAA Insurance, "distracted driving is a widespread problem across the nation and it will take a concerted effort to educate one another and elevate awareness of the danger it represents on our roads and highways."



Recently, a group of government, business and safety advocates joined forces to participate in Florida's first ever Distracted Driving Summit. The event was hosted by USAA Property and Casualty Insurance Group in collaboration with the Florida Department of Transportation, Shriners Hospitals for Children and the Distraction Advocate Network. The summit brought together more than 270 federal, state and local officials, law enforcement agents, traffic safety experts, physicians and a diverse cross-section of businesses to focus on reducing the incidence and impact of distracted driving in the state with U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood delivering the keynote address. He noted the growing momentum to end distracted driving nationwide and applauded the advocates for working tirelessly in Florida to remind drivers to keep their "eyes on the road, their hands on the wheel and their focus on driving."



During the summit, victims' families shared personal stories and physicians highlighted the traumatic injuries caused by distracted driving crashes. Shriners Hospitals for Children led a panel discussion on the types of injuries that can be sustained in motor vehicle crashes and highlighted treatment and care options.

According to Dr. Lawrence Vogel, MD, Shriners Hospitals for Children® Chicago, "Motor vehicle collisions are the leading cause of spinal cord injuries, and as a world leader in pediatric spinal cord injury rehabilitation and management, we are committed to doing our part to prevent injuries and fatalities on the road by promoting safe driving practices through education and awareness efforts."

As we all know, cell phone use has increased dramatically in the past several years and within all age groups. Texting has quickly become an epidemic, particularly among teens and young adults who, according to research by NHTSA indicates that "drivers under 25 are two to three times more likely to send or read a text message from behind the wheel." In the three years since the U. S. Department of Transportation began fighting against distracted driving, the number of states that have laws prohibiting drivers from texting behind the wheel has grown from 18 to 39 plus the District of Columbia, Guam and the U. S. Virgin Islands. Florida has not yet passed such a law, but some Florida legislators are working on it.



Picture courtesy of fastlane.dot.gov

According to www.stoptextsstopwrecks.org, there are several facts for you to remember:

Fact 1 – Five seconds is the average time your eyes are off the road while texting. When traveling at 55 mph, that's enough time to cover the length of a football field.

2009, Virginia Tech Transportation Institute

Fact 2 – A texting driver is 23 times more likely to get into an accident than a non-texting driver.

2009, Virginia Tech Transportation Institute

Fact 3 – Of those killed in distracted-driving-related-crashes, 995 involved reports of a cell phone as a distraction (18% of fatalities in distraction-related crashes.)

NHTSA

The dangers of distracted driving are real; good laws, good enforcement and personal responsibility can make a critical safety difference on our roadways. Please share this with family members and friends, especially any younger drivers!