

NZ researchers report first case of computer-related “eThrombosis”

Computers may be an unrecognized source of the same deep vein thrombosis associated with long-distance air travel, New Zealand researchers report (*Eur Respir J* 2003;21[2]:374-6). Internist Richard Beasley and colleagues recently diagnosed a pulmonary embolism in a 32-year-old man. After studying his sedentary lifestyle and learning that he had been spending up to 18 hours a day seated at his computer, the doctors coined a new phrase for his condition — “eThrombosis.”

Beasley, a professor at the Medical Research Institute of New Zealand, recently completed the largest study ever conducted on venous thromboembolism (VTE) associated with air travel — it involved 1000 New Zealanders who took long-haul flights.

FDA moves to highlight warnings about HRT

Hormone replacement therapies (HRTs) prescribed in the US must now carry warnings that consumers will notice more easily. The “black box” warnings were introduced in January after the Food and Drug Administration reviewed data from the Women’s Health Initiative (WHI) Study (*CMAJ* 2002;167[3]:294).

Health Canada will update its warnings after reviewing the same data, said spokesperson Ryan Baker. “I can’t say when that will be,” he added. The department has released a fact sheet outlining the risks and benefits of HRT and continues to advise women to discuss the study’s results with a physician.

The US warnings state that HRT should not be used to prevent cardiovascular disease. They also say that because the WHI study reported an increased risk of myocardial infarction, stroke, invasive breast cancer and venous thromboembolism, HRT should be prescribed for the shortest time possible.

The new US warnings appear on labels, in physician prescribing information and on patient leaflets. — *CMAJ*

He says the link between prolonged sitting and VTE was first reported in 1940 after British researchers observed cases of fatal pulmonary embolism among people who had sat in air-raid shelters for prolonged periods during the Blitz (*Lancet* 1940;2:744).

Beasley says the eThrombosis case proved intriguing because he and his colleagues could not find any risk factors for VTE until the patient told them about his working conditions. “That was one of the learning points for us, actually taking a work history in terms of mobility,” he told *CMAJ*. “[Physicians] are now getting pretty good about checking for long-distance air travel, and we have known for many years about mobility [problems] associated with surgery, but we often haven’t thought of asking about mobility associated with lifestyle.”

Was this an isolated case? To find out, Beasley’s team began a retrospective chart review at the Wellington Hospital involving patients with significant VTE

but without apparent risk factors. That second look revealed that many patients had spent long periods working at a computer or sitting for long periods in other work situations.

Beasley says he has learned “how common it is for people to spend such huge amounts of time in front of their computers. I never realized the very prolonged periods that are [often] involved, and I would not be surprised if this is a very significant problem.”

Beasley likens knowledge of eThrombosis to awareness of traveller’s thrombosis 5 years ago, before prospective studies on that phenomenon began appearing. “It wasn’t until the first case reports [had prompted] proper prospective studies that we were able to identify how common it was.”

Beasley, who plans to conduct a larger study of eThrombosis later this year, says it is easy to prevent the problem: simply get up from the computer every hour and exercise your feet while working. — *Heather Kent, Vancouver*

The cold truth about snowmobiling

Snowmobiling is one of the most dangerous sports in Canada, a report from the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) indicates (see page 739).

Major Injury in Canada 2002 indicates that 16% of severe sports and recreational injuries during 2000/2001 were caused by snowmobile accidents, a much higher rate than for winter sports such as downhill skiing (6%) and snowboarding (5%).

The data were collected from 30 trauma units in 7 provinces (facilities in Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador and Prince Edward Island did not participate). The study considered only the 92 most severe snowmobile-related injuries, which resulted in an average hospital stay of 2 weeks, including time in intensive care. Alcohol use was a factor in 26% of the cases. “[That] number ... is way too high,” says Julian Martalog, the study’s lead analyst.

Most of those severely injured on snowmobiles were male (85%), and the average age was 33.

Overall, snowmobiling ranks second only to cycling (18%) in terms of severe injuries incurred through sports and recreational activities. More than 250 000 snowmobiles are registered across Canada. Most are in Ontario and Quebec, where 76% of the severe injuries occurred.

The study, which used an international index to rate severity, found that snowmobilers had more severe injuries than participants in other winter sports. CIHI does not know if the number of severe injuries is rising in the sport, but data indicate that over the last 5 years there has been a 20% decrease in the number of snowmobile-related injuries, regardless of severity. — *Laura Aiken, CMAJ*

