

## Combating car accidents by examining the causes

Edmonton police have stepped up enforcement of seat-belt and antijaywalking laws in response to recommendations from University of Alberta researchers, whose unique pilot project aims to prevent motor vehicle injuries by focusing on their root causes.

“All injuries are predictable and preventable, but we can’t really say why people are getting injured [in motor vehicle accidents],” says Mohammed Naseem Hoque, a graduate student in the Department of Public Health Sciences.

Hoque and Dr. Louis Francescutti, an emergency physician at the Royal Alexandra Hospital, are working with the Edmonton police at the scenes of serious car crashes, where they document the causes of injuries. They then follow patients to the trauma centres at the Royal Alexandra and University of Alberta hospitals, where they document the injuries and further analyse the causes.

In the era before crash test dummies, physicians sometimes went to crash sites, explains Francescutti. “Crash test dummies have provided a lot of information, but they have taken us away from the real world. Forming this relationship with police officers allows us the opportunity to give them back preventive strategies that they can apply almost immediately.”

Since last fall, the researchers have collected data on 31 injuries from 23 accidents; they wrapped up their work last month.

Eventually, they would like to have a permanent injury prevention team in place in Edmonton, perhaps one that includes a retired police traffic accident reconstructionist. “If you drive by a fire, you’ll see a truck that says Fire Investigation, or if you drive by a crime scene, you’ll see a truck that sees Crime Scene Investigation,” says Francescutti. “We would want emergency medical services to have Injury Investigation as part of the way they do business.”



Researchers Mohammed Naseem Hoque (front) and Dr. Louis Francescutti are collaborating with Edmonton police officers such as Constable Tedd Benesch to reduce the number of car accidents.

Edmonton’s emergency physicians appear interested in the project. “As we show up in the trauma rooms, we are able to convey to them a better sense of what the accident scene looked like, and it helps them look for injuries that they may not have suspected,” says Francescutti. Soon, he and Hoque hope to begin sending digital images of accident scenes to emergency rooms before patients arrive. Francescutti hopes this kind of information will hasten the decision-making process.

“If the medical community focused on this aspect of medicine, we could save a lot of money and a lot of lives,” says Hoque. — Heather Kent, Vancouver

## NB launches ambitious Organ Donation Network

Although it’s only a few months old, the New Brunswick Organ Donation Network has already set itself the monumental challenge of increasing the province’s donor rate from 14 per million to 25 per million within the next 5 years. Its goal is to become Atlantic Canada’s leader in organ and tissue donation.

“There are very significant waiting lists for various transplants,” says Dr. Bill Goodine, president of the New

Brunswick Medical Society, one of several partners in the new venture. “Anything we can do to shorten those lists would be worth while.”

More than 80 New Brunswick residents are currently waiting for a transplant. Last year there were only 66 donors in the province. “When we compare ourselves to other countries, we can see we’ve fallen behind,” says Goodine. “It stands out that we are at 14.4 [donors] per mil-

lion. We’re really trying to find a New Brunswick solution, and this is the first step.”

That first step includes finding ways to garner greater public support for organ donation. Overall, Canada’s organ donor rate stands at 13.7 donors per million population. The world leader in organ donation is Spain, with 32 donors per million population. — Donalee Moulton, Halifax