

WMA STATEMENT ON INJURY CONTROL

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Injuries are the leading cause of death and disability in children and young adults. Injuries destroy the health, lives and livelihoods of millions of people each year. Yet many injuries are preventable. Injury control should be recognized as a public health priority requiring coordination among health, transportation and social service agencies in each country. Physician participation and leadership is necessary to assure the success of such injury control programmes.

The World Medical Association urges National Medical Associations to work with appropriate public and private agencies to develop and implement programmes to prevent and treat injuries. Included in the programmes must be efforts to improve medical treatment and rehabilitation of injured patients. Research and education on injury control must be increased, and international cooperation is a vital and necessary component of successful programmes.

National Medical Associations should recommend that the following basic elements be incorporated in their countries' programmes:

EPIDEMIOLOGY

The initial activity of such programmes must be the acquisition of more adequate data on which to base priorities, interventions and research. An effective injury surveillance system should be implemented in each country to gather and integrate information. A consistent and accurate system for coding injuries must be implemented by hospitals and health agencies. There should also be uniform coding of injury severity.

PREVENTION

Injury prevention requires education and training to teach and persuade people to alter their behaviour and thereby control their risk of injury. Laws and regulations based on scientifically sound methods of preventing injuries may be appropriate for effecting changes in behaviour (for example, the use of seatbelts and protective helmets). These laws must be strictly enforced in order to effectively influence behaviour changes. Improvements in product and environmental design of various products to provide automatic protection against injuries must be encouraged, as they will be the most effective means of preventing injuries. Implementing a reporting system to encourage learning from mistakes could also be beneficial in preventing future injuries.

BIOMECHANICS

Biomedical research on injury causation and prevention should be given priority. A better understanding of the biomechanics of injury and disability could enable the development of improved protection for humans. Regulations pertaining to product design must incorporate product safety standards developed from an improved understanding of the biomechanics of injury.

TREATMENT

Injury management at the scene of the occurrence must be enhanced by an effective system of communication with medical practitioners, to facilitate decision-making. Rapid and safe transportation to the hospital should be provided. An experienced team of trauma practitioners should be available at the hospital. There should also be adequate equipment and supplies available for the care of the injured patient, including immediate access to a blood bank. Education and training of medical practitioners in trauma care must be encouraged to assure optimal technique by an adequate number of physicians at all times.

REHABILITATION

Trauma victims need continuity of care emphasizing not only survival but also the identification and preservation of residual functions. Rehabilitation to restore biological, psychological and social functions must be undertaken in an effort to allow the injured person to achieve maximal personal autonomy and an independent lifestyle. Where feasible, community integration is a desirable goal for people chronically disabled by injury. Rehabilitation may also require changes in the patient's physical and social environment.