rate. However, above this level, there was a profound drop in traffic deaths, which has persisted over a 4-year period (figure 5).

A major weakness of the study is that we cannot be sure how much of the reduction in death rates was caused by the new camera surveillance system. Although the sixfold increase in the number of installed cameras was associated with a highly significant increase in the number of traffic tickets issued, it is possible that other factors such as an increase in the amount of fines, increased use of seat belts by motor vehicle occupants, more effective triage and transportation or improved patient care may have contributed to the lowered death rates.

Another weakness of this study is that although traffic deaths and serious injuries declined during the study period, the incidence of mild injuries not requiring hospitalisation increased. We believe that this could be related to improved notification of mild injuries or to the rapid population growth resulting in increased traffic density. Another explanation is that speed cameras decreased speeding enough to reduce the death rate, without affecting less severe injuries.

Opinions about the effectiveness of speed control cameras are conflicting.3–6 Most reports resemble our study, which used a before/after design. In Qatar, photo cameras appear to have had the greatest impact on fatal injuries rather than on severe or mild injuries, and decreases in motor vehicle deaths were more noticeable in younger persons, who constitute three-fourths of the population.

In 2008, of persons with serious injuries, about 20% were native Qatarsis, which is approximately equal to the proportion of Qatarsis in the population. Therefore, we believe that both the native and the non-native groups have about the same risk of motor vehicle injury. This is reassuring because many of the non-Qatari inhabitants come from countries where driving regulations differ from Qatar’s.

How do current death rates in Qatar compare to other regions? In 2009, many Western countries such as Spain, Ireland, Austria, France, Germany, UK, Sweden, Norway and Australia had road traffic death rates ranging from 5 to 10 per 100,000, lower than the 2009 rate of 14 per 100,000 for Qatar. This suggests that appropriate well-enforced laws have the potential for further reducing traffic death rates. This could be important in Qatar, where road traffic injuries have been considered an epidemic7 and more than 25% of drivers have been involved in a road traffic crash.8

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