

## Congratulations

EDITOR—Congratulations to ISCAIP for successfully producing the first four issues of *Injury Prevention*. The editor and editorial board have produced what for me is the most interesting, indeed entertaining, journal in public health. The editorials, opinions, disses, snippets, new and notes, etc are what set this journal apart from others. I am sure they will greatly facilitate the third of the editor's Christmas wishes (Vol 1, No 4) — playing a pivotal role in improving childhood injury prevention.

Talking of wishes, I have one: that the editor pays closer attention to what the scientific literature suggests re safe driving behaviour. I am specifically referring to his dictation while riding home on his bicycle! (Editorial, Vol 1, No 4). When the editor puts the next 'great deal of work' into preparing the journal's next listing of bibliographic citations he should take time out to read a recently published paper on the effects of mobile telephone use on driver behaviour.<sup>1</sup> That paper suggests that talking into such devices reduces reaction time and users do not compensate by increasing headway during the talking task. Given that apart from helmets there is little one can do to reduce the chances of injury once a bicycle crash has occurred I suggest the editor devote his full attention to the primary task at hand.

We need you Barry!

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1 Hakan A, Nilso L. The effects of mobile telephone use on driver behaviour in a car following situation. *Accid Anal Prev* 1995; 27: 707-15.

EDITOR,—I have spent most of today reading the Christmas issue of *Injury Prevention* and must compliment you on its content and presentation. You and Mike Hayes have highlighted real problem areas and I fear the blame for the present situation must sit fairly on the heads of health professionals, who have failed to recognise injury as an 'epidemic disease', and have shown little interest in developing the strategies to deal with it. If the energy, enthusiasm, and resources which have been provided for AIDS had been given to injury, the comments of you and Mike Hayes would not be necessary.

In Western Australia, I have been involved in many intervention projects, but none have been published. Project officers carry out the interventions, but all move on to other jobs before a report has been written which is suitable for publication. It is only academics with ongoing funding who have the time and facilities to produce articles for publication — but they do not carry out any active intervention programs. We need better funding of intervention projects to enable adequate time to be spent on evaluation, interpretation, and publishing the work. The suggestions made by Susan Baker are excellent but in the long term it is recognition by our colleagues of the importance of injury as a health issue which will determine how efficiently and effectively the results of intervention strategies are publicised.

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*Editor's note:* We do appreciate comments and congratulations but we also welcome constructive criticism regarding the journal or individual contributions.

## School bus related injuries

EDITOR,—I saw a recent small piece in the last issue of *Injury Prevention* about school bus related injuries. I have tried to look into school bus related injuries here in the United States, but I have had difficulty in doing so. My hypothesis is that most school bus related serious injuries and fatalities are the result of school buses being used for various kinds of field trips and special trips rather than the normal day-to-day transportation of students to and from school. On these special trips, school buses travel at high speeds on highways. Clearly, to me they were not built for this and should never be used for this purpose. Our own National Highway Traffic Safety Administration does not collect the kind of information that would allow me to test this hypothesis. Does anyone out there have any information on where school buses crashes occur and the kind of activities and roads on which they are being used to transport children?

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# BOOK REVIEWS

**Death on the Streets: Cars and the Mythology of Road Safety.** Robert Davis. (Pp 301; £11.99 softback.) Leading Edge, 1992/3. (The Old Chapel, Burtsett, Hawes, North Yorkshire DL8 3PB, UK.) ISBN 0-948135-46.

If you are fervently anticar in need of a refresher course on the arguments this book will be a good read. On the other hand, if you believe that to prevent death and injury one has to adopt measures that are practical and achievable, given the social and political climates and that progress can be made a step at a time, you should steer clear, except to see what you are up against.

The back cover of this paperback carries the telling phrase 'an essential guide for campaigners'. This accurately sums it up. This book was written by a campaigner for campaigners, not for scientists. Scientists, sometimes inconveniently, are bound by an ethic that requires them to look at the facts and in the light of all sides of an argument to draw a conclusion, however contrary that conclusion may be to their beliefs. Campaigners, by definition, are trying to persuade politicians and decision makers to support their cause — balance is not a word in their armoury.

Robert Davis is a campaigner who has researched death and injury on the roads (principally in the UK) and the current steps being taken for their prevention extensively. He firmly believes that we are going the wrong way about improving highway safety, but there is a conspiracy between organisations with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo and that '... the dominant definition of "road safety" (the author's quotation marks) in modern society is wrong'. He delivers every argument in support of his cause that you can imagine. But the nearest

that this book comes to a scientific textbook is the fact that the author references his sources fully — over 1000 in total.

Having said all of this, there are many aspects of the book with which most people would readily concur. We have inadequate data systems for road casualty reporting in the UK and the term 'accident' is unsatisfactory. We need better measures of exposure, especially for pedestrians, children, and cyclists. There has to be a balance between everyone's needs on the streets and highways, and we do need to provide safe places for children to play and safe means of getting there. I also fully accept the fact that seat belts have no beneficial effects on pedestrian casualties, just as cycle helmets do not prevent crashes between cars and bikes — although neither of these facts are of course arguments against seat belts and helmets. And perhaps more generally, cars are not good news for the environment or our health. Yes, common sense tells us that we will sooner rather than later have to accept the replacement of the car with an efficient, integrated public transport system for many journeys.

Whether you would regard this as riveting bedtime reading or a punishment (or, as a book reviewer, a duty) depends very much on your existing beliefs. Mine have not been changed by having to wade through these 300 pages.

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**Developing Personal Safety Skills in Children with Disabilities.** Freda Briggs. (Pp 214; £17.95 softback.) Obtainable from: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 116 Pentonville Road, London N1 9JB, UK or Paul H Brookes Publishing Co, PO Box 10624, Baltimore, MD 21285-0624, USA. ISBN 1-55766-184-7.

Over the past 20 years, children with various developmental disabilities have often been referred to in the education and pediatric literature as 'Children with special needs'. This rubric encompasses the challenges presented to the child, the family, and service providers in facilitating cognitive growth as well as teaching tasks of daily living, such as feeding, walking, and communication.

The field of childhood injury control focuses on understanding and preventing hazards in the social and physical environments from harming children. One particular hazard is the presence of pedophiles who seek to sexually abuse children. While all children require 'personal safety skills' to avoid this danger, children with disabilities require such skills even more, as they are sexually assaulted in frightening numbers. Sadly, such skills may be now seen as necessary tasks of daily living.

In her book, *Developing Personal Safety Skills in Children with Disabilities*, author Freda Briggs discusses the need to adapt safety skills curricula with the special needs of children with disabilities in mind. Part one describes the rationale for such an approach, emphasizing the importance of parent involvement with teachers in implementing a prevention effort. The magnitude of the problem is described through a summary of the literature combined with a conceptual framework emphasizing the vulnerability of children with disabilities to hazards in their environment. Research studies cited estimate the rate of sexual abuse of cognitively disabled girls between 25 and 68%. Part two