

# News and notes

## PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

*Dr Louis Hugo Francescutti*, Director of the Alberta Centre for Injury Control and Research, has been named Campus Dean for NOMS-West, the site of the Northern Ontario Medical School (NOMS) based at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Canada. He will begin his fulltime position with NOMS in July 2003. "Injury prevention and control have been brought to the forefront thanks to the work Francescutti has done on behalf of the Centre and for injury prevention in general", says ACICR Co-Director Kathy Belton. "He will be greatly missed for his innovative approaches to injury prevention and control and his ability as a communicator. His work has allowed Alberta to advance as a leader in the field of injury control". Dr Francescutti played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research, has developed several innovative injury prevention programs, and has been a tireless advocate for the cause.

*Alan Bryden*, formerly Director General of France's national standardization institute, AFNOR, has been appointed Secretary-General of ISO (International Organization for Standardization). His appointment comes at a point when international standardization is called on to respond to the globalization of trade, the issues posed by new challenges such as sustainable development, and the requirements of the information society. Since Alan Bryden took up the leadership of AFNOR in October 1999, he has undertaken a thorough transformation of the organization. AFNOR today is a group of services with an extended scope of standardization and a wide ranging participation in international standardization. In addition to the creation of certification, and training and consulting subsidiaries, AFNOR has become a true "e-enterprise" in all its business activities. Between 1981 and 1999, Alan Bryden, who has French and British nationalities, was Director General of the French national testing laboratory (Laboratoire National d'Essais), one of the country's leading establishments for metrology, testing, and certification. During this period, he founded Eurolab (the European Federation of Measurement, Testing and Analytical Laboratories) and served as its first President from 1990 to 1996. He began his career in metrology, notably with the USA's National Bureau of Standards (now the National Institute of Standards and Technology), after which he held different responsibilities in the

fields of quality and the rational use of energy. He was Vice President of the first Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade in GATT, the predecessor of the World Trade Organization.

## NEWS AND NOTES RAPID RESPONSES

It is now possible to submit a rapid response to a "news and notes" item, just as it is to a paper in the online version of *Injury Prevention*. You can use the facility to comment on the news items or submit new contributions for inclusion.

### Cell phones and road injuries

A new evaluation by the Harvard Center for Risk Analysis (HCRA) estimates that the use of cell phones by drivers may result in approximately 2600 deaths, 330 000 moderate to critical injuries, 240 000 minor injuries, and 1.5 million instances of property damage in America per year.<sup>1</sup> But because the data on cell phone use by motorists are still limited, the range of uncertainty is wide. The estimate of fatalities ranges between 800 and 8000, and the estimate of injuries is between 100 000 and one million. The study by Cohen and Graham revises the findings of work done in 2000 by the Center for Risk Analysis for AT&T Wireless. The new analysis was independently funded by HCRA, not by a cell phone company. It reflects more current data on cell phone use by motorists from



Alan Bryden

the US government agency, National Highway and Traffic Administration, and accounts for crashes not reported to authorities. It also updates earlier estimates of the economic benefits from cell phone use to account for a larger number of subscribers. "While the risk to any individual driver or passenger or pedestrian is very low", Cohen said, "because so many people use cell phones now, the overall risk to society raises an important issue for policy makers".

### AUSTRALIAN GUN CRACKDOWN

New laws banning a range of semiautomatic handguns have been agreed by the Australian states and territories. The Prime Minister John Howard has announced that a buy-back programme would be offered to owners of the guns and there would be an amnesty to hand in illegal and legal weapons. It is estimated that the decision will cut the number of handguns in Australia by at least 20%. The amnesty is expected to run from 1 July 2003 for a year.

### LOW COST ACCESS TO HEALTH JOURNALS

Forty three new countries were added to the list of eligible participants in the Health InterNetwork Access to Research Initiative (HINARI), giving them online access to 2200 high quality medical journals at drastically reduced prices. The 43 countries, which all have gross national products per capita of between \$1000 and \$3000, join the 69 low income countries (GNP/capita below \$1000) whose hospitals, medical schools, and research institutions already access the package for free. The total value of the publication package offered is in excess of \$750 000. While the poorest countries can access the publications for free, countries eligible under this second stage will pay an annual fee of \$1000 beginning with a six month free trial. Access for eligible institutions is granted through admission to a portal maintained by the World Health Organization (WHO). The 28 participating publishers are contributing the fees collected to a fund to train librarians and researchers to make the best use of the vast amount of information now being made available. HINARI has been developed by the WHO and its publisher partners to support the health sector in developing countries by enabling access to high quality, timely, relevant scientific information at affordable prices. It builds on recent developments in academic publishing and library services, particularly the shift from print to electronic

journal publishing. HINARI has evolved under the umbrella of the Health Inter-Network, a WHO led public-private partnership initiated by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan as part of his Millennium Agenda to narrow the digital divide.

### WEB BASED INJURY COURSE

*The role of the physician in injury control* ([www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/injurycontrol/start.htm](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/injurycontrol/start.htm)) is a new web based continuing education course for health care professionals. Its goal is to arm participants with injury control theory, and empower them to take an active part in professional and community efforts to prevent injuries or improve patient outcomes for specific types of injuries. The nine interactive modules of the course will take participants about two hours to complete, and grants continuing education for this valuable knowledge.

### SCOTTISH SEATBELT USE

The Scottish Executive commissioned the Halcrow Group Ltd to undertake research to establish the current rate of compliance with seatbelt wearing legislation, and whether there has been any significant change since 1997, updating the first study of compliance carried out in 1997. The commissioned research measured the rate of seatbelt wearing by drivers of cars, vans and taxis, and front and rear seat passengers (including children) in Scotland. This study shows that current seatbelt wearing rates in Scotland are 95% for drivers, 91% for front seat passengers, and 78% for rear seat passengers. Two further strands of research were added to establish the current extent of use of hand held mobile telephones by drivers of cars and vans in Scotland; and to carry out a literature review of research into the incorrect fitting of child car seat restraints, to establish if further research is required in this area. The main findings included there has been a 2.2% increase in correct seatbelt wearing among all vehicle occupants since 1997. Light van and taxi occupants had a substantially lower compliance rates than people travelling in cars. Rear seat restraint use rose from 71% to 78%, and there was a decline in restraint usage for children under 5 years. One percent of drivers were observed to be using hand held mobile telephone equipment. The report is available at [www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/transport/sbws-00.asp](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/transport/sbws-00.asp).

### US BOOSTER SEAT LAW PASSED

In November 2002, the US Congress passed so-called Anton's Law, directing the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to improve

federal standards for child vehicle restraint systems. The new law is designed to extend the standards to children who weigh over 50 pounds, typically children ages 4–8 years old. Children in this group can suffer serious injuries and possible vehicle ejection as a result of using loose fitting seatbelts designed for adults. Anton's Law is named after Anton Skeen, a 4 year old boy who was ejected and killed in a car crash in Washington state. As a result of this tragic event, Anton's mother, Autumn Skeen, became a child booster seat pioneer when she succeeded in getting the first state booster seat law passed in Washington in March 2000. The legislation also instructs NHTSA to require auto manufacturers to begin installing lap/shoulder belts in the center rear seat by 2005. By 2008, all new passenger vehicles will be required to have the rear seat equipped with a lap/shoulder belt system. Currently, most new passenger vehicles in the US are not manufactured with center lap/shoulder belts in the rear seats. Additionally, NHTSA will be required to evaluate injury criteria for children over 50 pounds; to look at how to improve seatbelt fit for children over 50 pounds in booster seats; and to assess the options for young children whose only restraint in the back seats are lap belts. The legislation also calls on NHTSA to develop a 10 year old child test dummy, and to study of the benefits of built-in child safety seats and booster seats.

### FALLS PREVENTION GUIDE

Health Canada's Division of Aging and Seniors has developed a new document called *Pathways*. It is a version of the Best Practice Guide for seniors falls prevention that BC Injury Research and Prevention Unit has available on its website, [www.injuryprevention.bc.ca](http://www.injuryprevention.bc.ca). To obtain a copy, contact Jennette Toews at Health Canada at [Jennette\\_Toews@hc-sc.gc.ca](mailto:Jennette_Toews@hc-sc.gc.ca).

### NEISS ALL INJURY PROGRAM DATA

The National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, in collaboration with the US Consumer Product Safety Commission, is releasing data from the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System All Injury Program (NEISS AIP). Data on all types and causes of non-fatal injuries treated at 100 NEISS hospital emergency departments obtained from July to December 2000 are now available through the University of Michigan's National Archive of Criminal Justice Data (NACJD). To access the data, go to [www.icpsr.umich.edu/NACJD/](http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/NACJD/), click on "access data", and do a *simple search* for 3582 in the study number. The documentation that accompanies the data set gives you a complete explanation of what is available.

### AUSTRALIAN ATTITUDES TO ROAD SAFETY

The Australian Traffic Safety Bureau ([www.atvb.gov.au](http://www.atvb.gov.au)) has released the 15th in a series of surveys of community attitudes and perceptions of a range of road safety issues. Telephone interviews with a national sample of 1563 Australian residents aged 15 years and over were conducted in 2002. ATSB reports that Australians continue to identify speed as the single most likely cause of road crashes. When asked to identify the main factor that leads to road crashes, 37% say speed, more than three times the number that say either drink driving (11%) or driver fatigue (11%). When asked to name up to three crash factors, over half the community include speed (62%) and drink driving (52%) in their list, and one in three include driver fatigue (33%). The research continues to show a growing awareness of the dangers of speed. A substantial minority of respondents still give answers that indicate a permissive attitude to speeding and speed limits, a clear majority of respondents give non-permissive answers to most of these questions. For example, 87% of respondents now support speed enforcement tolerances of less than 10 km/h in urban 60 km/h zones, and 91% of licence holders agree that "an accident at 70 km/h will be a lot more severe than an accident at 60 km/h". However, 32% of respondents still agree with the statement that *it is okay to speed if you are driving safely*. Support for a 50 km/h limit in residential areas remains strong (72%). Despite widespread recognition of the risks, the responses indicate less willingness to accept the need for speed enforcement, in comparison with its support for drink driving enforcement. Support for random breath testing is almost universal (now 97%), while more than half (56%) agree that *fines for speeding are mainly intended to raise revenue*. ATSB say that this reluctance to endorse speed enforcement may be linked to driver behaviour, with more people admitting to speeding than drink driving.

### 50 000 LIVES SAVED

Twenty years of mandatory seatbelt wearing for front seat passengers and drivers in the UK has saved an estimated 50 000 lives—equivalent to seven lives a day—according to the Department for Transport. Since the regulations were introduced in 1983, front seatbelts are estimated to have saved 50 000 lives, 590 000 serious casualties, and 1.5 m minor casualties.

### ROAD TRAFFIC INJURIES RESEARCH NETWORK

The Road Traffic Injuries Research Network (RTIRN) is a partnership of individuals, institutions and international

agencies, supported by the Global Forum for Health Research (Global Forum) and the Violence and Injury Prevention Department of the WHO. The network is a group of partners interested in reducing the burden of road traffic injuries, especially in low and middle income countries, through the promotion, conduct, and utilization of research. Partners from Uganda, Mexico, India, USA, Australia, the Global Forum, and WHO currently serve on the board.

As part of the process of establishing regular communication among network partners, a list serve has also been set up. The *RTIN group* is a strategy, which facilitates prompt communication and dissemination of information electronically. So far, many but not all partners and board members have subscribed to the

list serve—so please sign up! We are sending out reminders to partners as well. Information about the group can be viewed at: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/RTIN/>. Comments can be posted on the group site by partners or emails can be sent to [mariam\\_labinjo@yahoo.com](mailto:mariam_labinjo@yahoo.com) for posting.

**DANGEROUS PRODUCTS BAN**

The January newsletter of US “Kids in Danger” (KidsInDanger.org) reports that another state is going through the process of making it illegal to sell recalled or dangerous children’s products. New Jersey recently joined the list of states proposing the Children’s Product Safety Act. The act, based on model legislation first passed in Illinois in 1999, prohibits

the commercial use of recalled or dangerous children’s products or their use in licensed childcare facilities. If successful, New Jersey will join seven other states which have already enacted the Children’s Product Safety Act: Illinois, Michigan, Arkansas, Vermont, Louisiana, Missouri, and Rhode Island.

*Contributors to these news and notes include Anara Guard, Barry Pless, and Ian Scott. Michael Hayes has edited the contributions. Items for the December 2003 issue, including calendar entries, should be sent to Michael Hayes at the Child Accident Prevention Trust, 18–20 Farringdon Lane, London EC1R 3HA, UK (fax +44 (0)20 7608 3674, email [mh@capt.org.uk](mailto:mh@capt.org.uk)) by 1 September 2003.*

1 **Cohen JT, Graham JD.** A revised economic analysis of restrictions on the use of cell phones while driving. *Risk Anal* 2003;**23**:5–17.

**BOARD MEMBER BIOGRAPHY.....**

**Nancy Stout, EdD**

**D**r Stout is Director of the Division of Safety Research, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. She joined NIOSH in 1985 and has held various scientific and managerial positions with the NIOSH Division of Safety Research, primarily conducting and directing surveillance and epidemiologic research of occupational injuries. She became Director of the division in 1998. She has bachelor’s and master’s degrees in sociology and a doctorate in quantitative methods from West Virginia University, where she was also on the research faculty before joining NIOSH. She has published extensively on occupational injury research and prevention.

