Students meet surgeons and trauma victims in Canberra Hospital

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The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) supports a new pilot program that is underway with ACT schools to educate young people about the dangers of alcohol and the life-altering consequences it can have for trauma victims.

Six schools have been selected to participate in the pilot, which takes students through a range of activities and talks at Canberra Hospital with ambulance and emergency department nurses, surgeons, physiotherapists and trauma survivors.

The Prevention of Alcohol and Risk-related Trauma in Youth (P.A.R.T.Y.) pilot began last month and received just over $100,000 from the NRMA-ACT Road Safety Trust.

ACT Chair of the RACS Trauma Committee, and Director of Canberra Hospital’s Shock Trauma Service Dr Ailene Fitzgerald said the pilot aimed to reduce the incidence of alcohol and risk-related trauma in youth.

“Each week, on average, more than 100 Australians die and more than 3,000 are hospitalised as a result of excessive alcohol consumption,” Dr Fitzgerald said.

“In the ACT, people aged 16–24 years have the highest rates of injury. They are more likely to drink at risky levels or engage in activities like texting while driving, and this means they are more likely to end up in hospital.

“One of the worst things I will ever have to do in my job is to tell a young person’s parents that their child has been killed in a car accident, or fallen off a balcony because they’ve had too much alcohol. It’s tragic, and it’s preventable.”

The P.A.R.T.Y. program originated in North America and has been running in Australia since 2006. There are more than 100 sites worldwide.

RACS Trauma Committee Chair Dr John Crozier said highly effective P.A.R.T.Y. programs were being run in WA, South Australia, Victoria, NSW and Queensland.

“The Perth program is estimated to cost $1,000 to run each week, while the health costs of a quadriplegic are estimated at roughly $8 million for the rest of their shortened life,” Dr Crozier said.

“Program participation was associated with a reduced subsequent risk of committing violence- or traffic-related offences, injuries, and death among juvenile justice offenders.

“There is huge community support for these programs, so we hope to see the ACT program funded after the pilot concludes in June,” Dr Crozier said.