Drivers using a mobile phone are four times more likely to crash

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Surgeons from around the country are meeting today in Melbourne to explore the correlation between distractions such as using a mobile phone while commuting and the epidemic of road trauma.

Scientific co-convenor of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) Trauma Symposium, ‘Fatal Distraction’ Dr Valerie Malka is a trauma and general surgeon at Liverpool Hospital, the largest trauma centre in Sydney.

She says that driving and talking or texting on the phone is a contributing factor in one in five car crashes and two in three truck crashes.

“It’s difficult to estimate the size of the problem in terms of distracted commuting because we don’t collect statistics in hospitals, however more than 90 per cent of Australian drivers own a mobile phone, and 60 per cent report using it while driving,” Dr Malka says.

“The majority of those using their phones while commuting are 18-24 year olds, and this age group also has the highest representation in road trauma statistics.

“Three out of five drivers in that age group have reported sending or using texts while driving, compared with one in three drivers over the age of 25.

“People still don’t seem to be heeding the warning that using your phone while driving, riding a bicycle or as a pedestrian can be fatal.

“From January to June this year, police issued nearly 35,000 mobile phone infringements in NSW, and this is because drivers holding a mobile phone while driving are four times more likely to crash.”

More than half of the trauma surgery undertaken in Australia is road transport related. Annually there are 32,000 hospitalisations for serious injury, and 1,400 deaths. The financial cost each year is $27 billion.

“Most people are shocked to learn that if you look at your phone for two seconds while travelling at a speed of 60 kilometres per hour, you travel 35 metres with your eyes off the road,” Dr Malka says.

“On behalf of all trauma surgeons, please don’t underestimate the danger, and please don’t use your phone while you are driving.

“We urge Australians - particularly young Australians - to think seriously about the danger to others, not just themselves, because pedestrians and cyclists are severely at risk from these types of distractions.”

View more information about the RACS trauma symposium, ‘Fatal Distraction’.

About RACS

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