MEDIA RELEASE

Serious hand injuries evident in NZ from saws and log splitters

Friday 12 May, 2017
The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) has today heard that hand injuries caused by saws and log splitters are placing a significant burden on individuals, and the New Zealand health system.

Dr Ryan Ruxton, a plastic and reconstructive surgical registrar at Hutt Hospital, presented the findings of a retrospective study to the RACS Annual Scientific Congress in Adelaide today.

He encouraged the New Zealand government to consider adopting more rigorous regulatory protocols to protect public safety.

The study examined 1756 admissions over a two-year period, and showed that machinery accidents represented 22 per cent of admissions. This was higher than all other categories, such as sporting, glass, door and knife injuries.

Of those injuries categorised as ‘machinery’ approximately 50 per cent were due to saws or log splitters. Dr Ruxton said that while the results were unsurprising, the increased severity of these types of injuries warranted further investigation.

“We had noticed for some time that a lot of the hand trauma requiring replantation (usually as a result of mutilation or amputation), were due to saws or log splitters.”

“Our feeling was that these types of injuries were generally much more severe in nature and were placing a greater burden on resources.”

“The data backed this up and showed that on average these types of admissions tend to have required more operations, and patients spent approximately 70 per cent longer in hospital.”

As part of the study, injuries from workplace accidents were categorised separately from machinery accidents. The results showed that workplace accidents accounted for a much lower rate of injury when compared with machinery injuries.

Dr Ruxton believes that this could likely be explained by a number of inexperienced home-users operating equipment, which is often hired, and does not contain adequate safety mechanisms.

“A lot of people may not realise just how dangerous saws (such as circular and table saws) and log splitters can be. Log splitters, for example, are quite slow and are operated hydraulically.

“They usually require a trigger to operate, which under New Zealand law, can be within an arm’s length of the wood. This means that the other hand is able to touch the wood at any point, which has proven hazardous, particularly for people who may not be as experienced operating the machinery and may have tried to manually adjust the wood at any point.

“Our research found that in other countries, such as many Eastern European countries, much stricter regulations exist to mitigate the risks of these types of injuries.”

“We would encourage the New Zealand Government to give serious consideration to similar legislation, as it could potentially reduce suffering and the number of patients that we see, while saving considerable resources for the health system.”

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