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McLeod doctors focus study on motorcycle head injuries



John D. Russell/MORNING NEWS

McLeod Health general trauma surgeon Dr. Mark Reynolds poses Thursday with CT scans showing damaged brains as a result of motorcycle collisions. Reynolds, along with neurosurgeon Dr. William Naso, conducted a study of cases of people involved in motorcycle wrecks.

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By JAMIE DURANT
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FLORENCE — Going without a helmet when riding a motorcycle could cost a person his life, according to two local doctors .

The study — conducted by Dr. William Naso, a neurosurgeon with Florence Neurosurgery and Spine, and Dr. Mark Reynolds, director of trauma services at McLeod Health — focused on the occurrence of traumatic head injuries in motorcycle accidents treated at McLeod Health from 2003 to 2007.

The doctors were accompanied in the study by Naso's partners Dr. Andy Rhea, Dr. Christopher Paramore, Dr. James Brennan and a medical student intern from Furman University, Eric Askea.

“Motorcycles are intrinsically dangerous devices,” Reynolds said. “Motorcyclists suffer fatal wrecks at 16 to 20 times the rate of other motorists.”

The study found only 28 percent of 167 patients involved in motorcycle accidents wore helmets.

Naso said not wearing a helmet roughly doubled the chances of a patient having bleeding on the brain, a skull fracture or a spinal fracture.

Contrary to popular belief, Naso said, wearing a helmet doesn't increase the risk of spinal injuries.

“Clearly, you can still sustain a head injury with a helmet, but you would be almost twice as likely to have a (massive) injury (without one),” he said.

The decision whether to wear a helmet is up to the rider in South Carolina, but Reynolds said deciding not to wearing a helmet could be the last decision some motorcyclists make.

“As a trauma surgeon, I have seen a lot of people suffer and die,” he said. “Once the body has hit the pavement ... it is already too late for too many.”

Although wearing a helmet is automatic for some riders, others feel they have the right to choose, Reynolds said.

But that should make them responsible for the high cost of care after a traumatic brain injury, he said.

“Helmet use should be second nature for any motorcyclist, but if they chose not to wear a helmet, then they should help defray the cost to society for their behavior,” Reynolds said.

Naso said it is clear nationally that helmets can help prevent death among motorcycle riders, but here in South Carolina, laws that give riders the right to choose often lead to much more deadly accidents.

“People who are on a motorcycle or mo-ped and they are involved in a low-velocity accident, this is where a helmet can make the difference in having a serious traumatic brain injury versus a mild traumatic brain injury,” Naso said.

Reynolds said the study offers proof that wearing a helmet — even for short trips to the store or across the neighborhood — could save a motorcyclist's life.

“A little foresight goes a long way,” he said. “Prevention is much better than treatment.”

Reader Reactions

Posted by (mmamike) on January 23, 2009 at 9:17 am

Doctor in your study did you calculate which accidents were not the motorcycle riders fault. What we need is accident prevention not accident protection.

Aslo doc wash your hands more people die from hospital infections and the cost is far higher than any head trauma suffered by a motorcycle rider.

THE CDC states that the cost of motorcycle accident head trauma is half that of car driver head trauma.

DOc did you wear your helmet in your car to work this morning.

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