



Accidents happen—Not always!

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Hardly an hour without hearing about ‘injuries’ in this accident or that event.

We read that this person “died from their injuries” or were “hospitalized with injuries.” This is not surprising as thousands of Canadians die every year from injuries. In BC, about 200 young lives are lost to injuries annually. Clearly, ‘injuries’ should be a concern. Shouldn’t they?

Most people injuries as ‘accidents’ that we cannot do anything about. They could not be more wrong. Yes, accidents do happen, and people are injured as a result, but they occur in predictable ways. And they happen again and again. Accidents are not a normal part of life — they are both predictable and preventable.

Take as an example a the death of a 42-year-old swimmer who was caught in a riptide and drowned. Or the 18-year-old driver thrown through the windshield of his vehicle during a collision. He died from a head injury. Accidents? Yes, and perhaps no. Had the swimmer known to swim across the current, he might be alive today. Had the driver been wearing a seatbelt, same thing.

Injuries come in two main flavours: intentional, and unintentional. Intentional injuries result from a decided action. For example suicide, acts of violence like rape, homicide, assault, family violence and child and elder abuse. Unintentional injuries can occur in the home, or in relation to transportation, sports, or the workplace. These are often caused by a breakdown or lack of regulation or enforcement, or by lack of common sense.

Effective injury control needs to combine many elements: prevention, emergency medical service, acute

care and rehabilitation.

Primary prevention includes having proper legislation, contractual provisions, good engineering, and education, all trying to prevent injury from occurring the first place. For example, having a fence around the swimming pool is primary prevention. Smoke detectors, speed limits, mandatory seatbelts, and helmets for cyclists are all primary prevention tools. So is safety training on the job (e.g. for WHMIS or ergonomics).

Secondary prevention includes having well-trained and available emergency services to limit consequences of injury. Tertiary prevention relates to the rehabilitation process which aims to bring the injured person back to (or as close to) pre-injury status as soon as possible.

Still, most people think: accidents happen, as do injuries. The first step to preventing injuries is knowledge — so stop thinking that way! But what can we do? Using the proper safety equipment (helmets, seatbelts, gloves) is a good place to start. Educate yourself (boating and ocean safety, poison prevention). And remember that taking risks includes taking responsibility for the consequences of our actions, so it might help in stopping an accident before it happens.

All that said, perhaps the most effective tool is also the one we should all carry with us: common sense. If the tree limb feels weak, it probably is; do you really want to be on one of those “stupid people video” television shows?

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