

While UMC Brackenridge Research Links Bicycle Helmets and Injury, Alcohol Use Determined More Dangerous

AUSTIN, Texas – (May 28, 2008) – Researchers at University Medical Center at Brackenridge, a member of the Seton Family of Hospitals, today released results of a year-long study that indicates cyclists are nearly twice as likely to suffer a brain injury if they are not wearing a bicycle helmet and nearly four times more likely to suffer a head or brain injury if they had been drinking alcohol.

Researchers studied 200 injured adult cyclists in the Central Texas area from December 2006 to November 2007. The data collected for the The Alcohol, Bicycle Helmets and Head Injury in Austin study looked at bicycle accident victims presenting at the UMC Brackenridge's Level II Trauma Center. It analyzed factors such as whether they wore a helmet and used alcohol or drugs. It also examined their bicycling experience, location and type of accident, speed of the accident and degree of head or brain injury.

In 1996, former Mayor Bruce Todd led an effort to pass a law requiring bicycle helmets on riders, only to see it repealed in 1997 after he left office. In 2006, the City Council considered bringing back the all-ages law, but no action was taken. The idea of a helmet law resurfaced when The League of Bicycling Voters presented an alternate proposal: an 18-month study of bicycle safety in Austin including ways to actually improve conditions for safe cycling. The UMC Brackenridge study preliminary results released today are part of that compromise initiative.

"Riding a bike requires more attention than driving a car and you don't have that metal armor, the car's body, around you," said Dr. T.J. Milling, investigator and director of clinical research of Emergency Departments at UMC Brackenridge and Dell Children's. "Of course, if you drive drunk, you're just as likely to kill someone else. Riding a bicycle drunk, the brain you damage is your own."

Researchers will continue The Alcohol, Bicycle Helmets and Head Injury in Austin study for another year.

"Based on the preliminary results from the study and that you're twice as likely to have a serious head injury without a helmet, I strongly encourage cyclists to wear their helmets and seatbelts because I don't ever want to see them in our trauma center," said Dr. Pat Crocker, investigator and chief of emergency medicine, Dell Children's Medical Center of Central Texas.

"We are making a targeted effort to increase the amount and quality of clinical research taking place at UMC Brackenridge," said Thomas P. Erlinger, MD, director of clinical research, Seton Family of Hospitals. "Several studies, like this one, have direct relevance to our patient population and the greater community. That is our goal. To encourage relevant and high-quality research that can impact people's lives."

At a news conference today, Dr. Pat Crocker read a statement by the Travis County Medical Society in support of the principle of mandatory bicycle helmet use for riders of all ages. He further mentioned the need to revisit this issue and challenged the Austin City Council to take appropriate action.

The amount of medical research at the UMC Brackenridge has dramatically increased recently, with more than 200 active studies currently underway covering a wide range of topics including studies on aneurysms, stroke, snakebites and IV insertion during STARFlight transport.