

20 November, 2003

Kristen Murray,
Executive Officer,
Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee
Level8, 35 Spring Street,
MELBOURNE 3000

Dear Ms Murray,

Re: Parliamentary Inquiry – Death and Injury on Victorian Farms

I refer to your letter of 29 September, 2003 to Professor Humphreys, who has asked me to prepare an initial response.

This response contains information from the early stages of the analysis of data I collected in Warrnambool as one of a series of projects to be submitted for award of Doctor of Health Science (Deakin University). Considerably more analysis is required, some of which may be available at the time of your rural and regional consultations in early 2004. If required I would be happy to present to the Committee when it was sitting in Gippsland or adjoining areas. Given the preliminary nature of the data, no recommendations have been made at this time.

Should presentation to the Committee be requested, further analysis will have been undertaken by that time. This would allow (for example):

- reconfirmation of the figures presented below
- a comparison of computer generated data with that in the medical record, allowing comment on the validity of the computer generated data
- further information on the types and causes of injury, including some specific comment on motor bike related injury.

Commentary on other specific issues, if requested by the Committee, may also be possible if the data are available.

Data were collected on all patients presenting as a result of an acute farm injury over a 6 year period from January 1, 1996 until December 31, 2001. Patients were identified through use of the VISAR Injury Surveillance System used in the Emergency Department. However, as the (then) Director of Emergency Services at the hospital, I was able to review patient medical records, allowing comparison of the computer generated data with that in the medical record.

A total of 997 cases were identified. Features that have been identified from some of the early data analysis include:

- there has been an increase in the rate of farm injury presentation over the time
 - case presentation numbers for each of the last 3 years was above the average for the 6 years of the project
 - the highest rate of presentations occurred in 2001
- the age distribution of presentations reflects a pattern markedly different to the Emergency Department's "injury experience" for all other injuries (combined)
 - the peak presentation ages (by decade) were almost equally shared between the 3 decades covering the ages 20-49
 - there were 2 presentations of people over age 90
- the relatively high initial admission rate (27%) following farm injury - however, this rate is an under-representation of the true picture
 - a further 26 patients were either admitted (electively) the following day or subsequently required admission or re-admission (giving an admission rate of – at least – 29.7%)
 - at least 6 patients were re-admitted on a further 2 occasions
 - the average length of stay of patients in South West Healthcare admitted directly from the Emergency Department was 4.04 days (range 1-22 days)
 - 131 patients had documented evidence of follow-up visits (varying from 1 visit to 7) totalling a further 213 occasions of service

I trust this information is of use to the Committee and look forward to the opportunity to elaborate on the implications of my research findings in person. At this stage, as the data comes from doctoral study and is the result of a preliminary analysis, I would appreciate the information remaining confidential until further analysis is conducted. I would expect this to occur by early in the New Year and hopefully by the time of your rural and regional consultations.

Yours faithfully,

A/Prof Daryl Pedler
Director,
Gippsland Regional Clinical School
Monash University