

Scooters cause 9500 injuries in US in 8 months

Deborah Josefson *San Francisco*

A sharp rise in injuries related to using foot propelled scooters is leading to an increased demand that children using them should wear mandatory protective gear.

The US Consumer Product Safety Commission has reported that emergency room visits from scooter related mishaps are up 700% since May. In all, 9500 injuries have been reported so far this year, with over 4000 of these reported in August.

Most scooter accidents have occurred in children aged under 15 years, and fractures account for 30% of the injuries.

Scooters have recently become enormously popular in the United States, Europe, Hong Kong, and Israel; both children and adults can be seen using them in crowded cities.

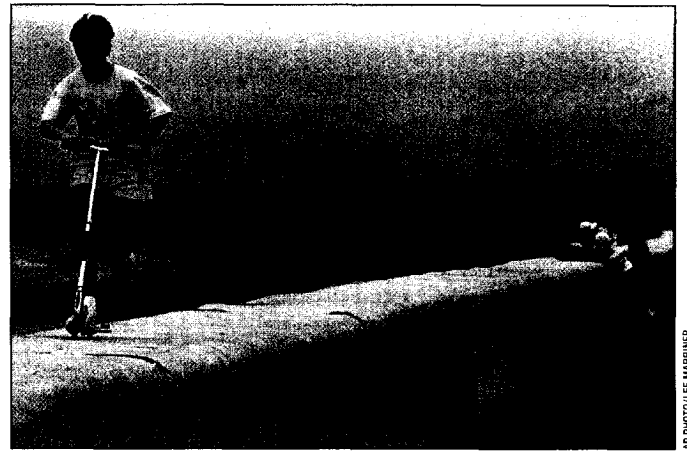
The current models are updated versions of their 1950s predecessors and feature light-

weight, foldable metals such as aluminium or titanium, narrow bases, and low friction wheels similar to those used in in-line skates. Most models weigh less than 4.5 kg, cost \$80-\$120 (£53-£80), and are portable.

Most injuries are sprains, but fractures and dislocations accounted for almost a third of the reported mishaps. Head injuries also occur. So far, no deaths have been reported.

Compared with injuries from in-line skating and skateboards, which amounted to 100 000 and 60 000 respectively in 1999, scooter injuries seem low. However, this may just reflect a catch-up period; in 1992, when in-line skating first became popular, the Consumer Product Safety Commission collected only 10 000 reports of in-line skating accidents.

The commission is recommending that children who use



AP PHOTO/LEE MARRINER

Emergency room visits for scooter injuries are up 700% since May

scooters don full safety gear, including helmets, knee pads, and elbow pads. Additionally, they recommend that users adhere to well paved surfaces and avoid street traffic. Children aged under 8 should not be using scooters without supervision, and using them at night should be avoided, said the Consumer Product Safety Commission.

Ann Brown, the commission's chairwoman, commented:

"We're trying to head off some of the kind of injuries that happen with in-line skates and let people know about the safety gear early on." Some states are proposing that bicycle helmets be worn by children on scooters.

Meanwhile, legislation to ban motorised versions of the scooters have been drafted in Colorado, and such scooters have been prohibited in New South Wales, Australia. □

Cannabis use falls among Dutch youth

Tony Sheldon *Utrecht*

Cannabis use among Dutch schoolchildren aged 10-18 years has fallen for the first time in 16 years, a national survey of risk behaviour among 10 000 young people has shown.

The school survey, carried out by Trimbos, the Netherlands Institute for Mental Health and Addiction (www.trimbos.nl), showed that about one in five young people had used cannabis at some time in their lives but less than a tenth had used it in the previous four weeks ("current users").

Such a survey is carried out every four years with funding from the health ministry. The surveys have shown that cannabis use among current users rose sharply in the early and mid-1990s, from a figure of 3% in 1988 to a high of 11% in 1996. The figures for current users in 2000 were 9.3% (12.4%

for boys and 6.5% for girls), compared with 10.7% (13.7% for boys and 7.7% for girls) in 1996.

The latest results also show a 40% reduction in use of ecstasy from 2.2% to 1.4% and in use of amphetamines from 1.9% to 1.1%. Cocaine use increased from 1.1% to 1.2%.

Among cannabis users most had smoked the drug once or twice in the previous four weeks; a third of cannabis smokers were "frequent users" (had smoked two or more times a week). More than half of cannabis users bought their drug from other users, a third from "coffee shops," and one in 10 from dealers.

The Dutch survey follows recent data also showing a "striking" reduction in drug use among 15-16 year olds in the United Kingdom (*BMJ* 320:1536-7), even though more than a third had used cannabis.

The Dutch health minister, Els Borst, has called for more research into why young people use drugs. She believes a more open debate is now possible. Together with Germany and Switzerland, she is calling for a European "scientific and political" conference on soft drugs. □

Move to ban private practice may be illegal

Linda Beecham *BMJ*

The BMA believes that the proposal in the UK government's recent health reform programme for England, *The NHS Plan* (5 August, p 317), that newly qualified consultants should work exclusively for the NHS for "perhaps" the first seven years of their career may be illegal. The association has taken advice on European and human rights legislation and hopes to negotiate with the government to change the proposal.

The chairman of the BMA's council, Dr Ian Bogle, said, "We don't think that you can control what qualified doctors do in their spare time. Is it intended that junior consultants would not be able to do legal work, write articles, do broadcasting, or anything else outside their chosen profession?" The BMA is also concerned that young consultants might decide to work exclusively for the private sector

after the NHS has spent years training them.

The BMA also does not believe that the government's plans for reform will work without an additional 8000 to 10 000 GPs.

In the plan the government promised that by 2004 there would be an extra 2000 GPs and that all patients should be able to see a GP with 48 hours. But the BMA said after a meeting of the association's council executive last week that 1100 of the 2000 were already in the pipeline. It would not be possible to meet the requirement for 24 hour access and quicker appointments and give patients longer consultation times.

The BMA is also opposed to the proposal for a new "subconsultant" grade for newly qualified specialists if the talks on a new consultant contract break down.

Dr Bogle said, however, that the BMA supported 97% of the plan and wanted to work with the government to implement it. It supports the boost in screening programmes and the proposals for quicker diagnosis and treatment for heart disease, cancer, and mental health. □