MEDIA RELEASE
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Why sports injury hospitalisations are higher in regional Australia

New research has revealed the rate of hospitalisation for sports injuries is significantly higher in regional Australia than in metropolitan areas, challenging the way in which policy makers think about health service delivery.

Professor Caroline Finch, from Federation University Australia in Ballarat, has analysed seven years of hospital admissions data from across Victoria, to identify population sub-groups which have higher rates of injury hospitalisation.

She found that 182 adults per 100,000 per year were admitted to a regional hospital with a sporting injury, compared to just 140 adults per 100,000 in metropolitan areas.

“For every year in this study, rural and regional areas had higher rates of sports injury hospital admissions than metropolitan areas, for both children and adults,” Prof. Finch said. “These findings highlight the need for pro-active guidance for regional health services to both keep pace with the healthcare demands of sports injuries and to prevent them occurring in such high numbers.”

Prof. Finch, who will present her findings to next month’s RUN Regional Futures Conference in Rockhampton, said the data only covered cases where the patient was admitted to hospital over one or more nights, which were usually the more severe injuries such as fractures or concussions.

“As they result in hospital admission, these are the most expensive injuries to treat, and they are also the types of injuries which can have life-long implications,” she said.

“This gives policy makers extra reason to think about the way in which services are provided in regional areas, particularly given the fact that sport is such an integral part of the social fabric of these communities.”

Prof. Finch said access to both basic and allied health services, injury prevention programs, and the quality of sporting facilities, were all areas requiring examination.

“What we suspect is happening is more people are being admitted in hospitals in regional areas due to the lack of allied health services which are available in the city. For example, we know there are fewer GPs and fewer physiotherapists in regional areas,” she said.

“We also know that there are more injuries from contact football and wheeled motorsports in regional areas than in the city, and this may be due to the quality of the facilities where teams are playing, such as dry or bare-turfed footy fields.”
“With rural and regional communities also suffering higher rates of obesity and heart diseases, it is really important that we further research this area because we want more people playing sport so that they lead healthier lifestyles, but we don’t want to see them suffering life-long injuries from participating.”

Prof. Finch is one of more than 60 researchers who will be speaking at the 2016 RUN Regional Futures Conference, an initiative of the Regional Universities Network (RUN) to be held at CQUndiversity Rockhampton from June 21 to 24. Like many of the speakers, Prof. Finch is a leader in her field, heading up the Australian Collaboration for Research into Injury in Sport and its Prevention, one of only nine research centres around the world which is supported by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

RUN is comprised of six regional universities - CQUndiversity, Federation University Australia, Southern Cross University (SCU), University of New England (UNE), University of Southern Queensland (USQ), and University of the Sunshine Coast (USC).

The conference will address the challenges facing regional Australia and draw attention to the ways in which universities can work with government, community and industry, to drive innovation, engagement and research, and create vibrant, successful futures for regional economies and communities.

The program will feature presentations from research students, academics, politicians, community and industry representatives under five theme areas of Economic, Healthy, Sustainable, Digital and Creative futures and will also feature keynote talks from Dr Geoff Garrett, the Chief Scientist of Queensland; Jack Archer, Chief Executive Officer, Regional Australia Institute (RAI); and Nick Behrens, Director Advocacy & Workplace Relations, Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland (CCIQ).

For more information and to register to attend the Regional Futures conference, go to http://conference.run.edu.au/

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