

10 January, 2014

Here's cheers to a safe and healthy 2014

Ring in the New Year can bring happiness and excitement to many, but for others, arriving in the local Emergency Department and spending time in hospital can certainly dampen the spirits.

St George and Sutherland Hospital staff were kept busy over the festive season with the usual high levels of Emergency Department presentations normally seen this time of year.

Sutherland Hospital treated 1,619 patients during the period 24 December, 2013 to 3 January, 2014, with 22 per cent of patients being admitted. Presentations included chest pain, abdominal pain, limb pain, minor fractures, breathing problems, lacerations and falls.

St George Hospital treated 2,267 patients during the same period, with 31 per cent of patients admitted for care. According to Dr Peter Grant, Senior Staff Specialist, Emergency Department, St George Hospital, there can be an increase of up to 40 per cent in presentations over the holiday period for a wide variety of reasons.

"This year, we treated children who have suffered injuries due to accidents involving skateboards, bikes, and Christmas toys; and elderly patients suffering falls or other mishaps in the unfamiliar environment of relative's homes," Dr Grant said.

"Patients transported by road ambulance or airlifted to Hospital with major trauma also peaked over the Christmas and New Year period, with one quarter of cases involving patients aged from 16 to 24, with males over-represented."

The majority of injuries occurred during outdoor recreational activities or other high risk behaviours, often with alcohol as a factor.

"Our clinicians continue to stress the importance of taking care on the roads and while participating in outdoor recreational activities. Children riding bikes and skateboards should use protective equipment such as helmets and knee pads.

"Additionally, moderation in consumption of alcohol and avoidance of situations that may lead to potential violent confrontations are the keys to reducing the risk of assault.

"It's important to keep a close eye on elderly relatives with impaired mobility in unfamiliar surroundings and advisable to make regular checks on the well-being of the chronically unwell or socially isolated to avoid the need to attend the Emergency Department."

"We have experienced summer heatwave conditions which can lead to heat-related presentations, particularly for elderly patients or those with chronic medical conditions. People should take precautions on very hot days such as maintaining hydration, minimising physical activity, wearing light clothing and avoiding alcohol," Dr Grant said.

Patients with non-urgent conditions should attend a 24-hour GP clinic or contact the 24-hour free hotline *Healthdirect* Australia on 1800 022 222, which is manned by a registered nurse. Patients who are experiencing heart and breathing problems or who need urgent medical attention should always attend their Emergency Department or contact Triple 0.

South Eastern Sydney Local Health District

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healthdirect AUSTRALIA – providing expert health advice 24 hours a day to NSW residents – Tel. 1800 022 222