



# Media release

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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Sideswipe injury study**

Royal Perth Hospital orthopaedic doctors have found that people are still suffering sideswipe injuries despite legislation forbidding drivers and passengers from having body parts outside the vehicle.

The study, by Drs Vera Kinzel, Allan Skirving, Michael Wren and Rene Zellweger, examined eleven participants who sustained sideswipe injuries to the upper limb.

RPH Registrar Dr Kinzel is leading the study and said the main outcome measures were accident pattern, type of injury, surgical managements, complications and functional and employment implications.

“Drivers and passengers resting their elbow on the car window or protruding their arm from an open window can sustain several sideswipe injuries of the arm either from a collision with a passing vehicle or from the exposed arm striking a fixed object,” Dr Kinzel said.

Sideswipe injuries, although now less common, have not been eliminated, despite Australian legislation forbidding drivers or passengers from having any body part outside the vehicle.

“Although these injuries are rarely fatal, sideswipe accidents result in severe soft-tissue injuries combined with open fractures or partial amputation of the upper limb, often complicated neurovascular injuries.

“Management involves multiple operations and long rehabilitation periods.

“We have noticed a surprisingly high incidence of sideswipe injuries in drivers and passengers from rural areas of Western Australia.

During the 18-month study period, 479 people required in-patient treatment at RPH for injuries caused by a motor vehicle accident.

Of these, 11 were admitted after sideswipe motor vehicle injuries to the upper limb.

Dr Kinzel said divided highways and wider roads, air conditioning and heightened public awareness had decreased the number of patients presenting with sideswipe injuries, but overall these changes had failed to fully prevent these devastating and life changing injury – especially in rural areas.

“Despite a prolonged rehabilitation period, residual deformity and impairment can be expected in most patients, and this can prevent return to pre-accident occupation and result in financial difficulties and reliance on welfare systems,” she said.

“Increased awareness of this problem and further recommendations to keep arms within the vehicle, as well as improved car design, legislation and road conditions, especially in rural areas, are factors most likely to decrease the incidence of this frequently devastating but easily prevented injury.”