

Injury is no accident

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As is evident from the injury statistics presented by Dr. Tallon, injury causes incalculable human suffering each day in Nova Scotia. But, did you know that 95% of all injuries and the events that lead to their occurrence are caused by predictable circumstances? This suggests that we need to change how we view the problem of injury. One way we can accomplish this is to stop calling injuries “accidents”.

The **British Journal of Medicine** states that “an accident is often understood to be unpredictable — a chance occurrence or as *an act of God* — and therefore unavoidable” (Vol 322, pp. 1320, June 2001). By continuing to refer to injury-causing events as accidents, we perpetuate the

myth that injuries just happen and there is nothing that can be done to prevent or control them.

The Nova Scotia Trauma Program has begun a campaign to encourage people, particularly the media, health care professionals, emergency services personnel, injury prevention organizations, and academic researchers to stop referring to events such as those described in the box, as *accidents!*

Furthermore, we believe that these groups have a professional obligation to stop perpetuating the myth that trauma is an *accident*. By removing the term *accident* from our injury vocabulary, we will be able to shift our focus to the factors that cause injuries and the strategies we can adopt to prevent them from happening in the first place.

Where can you start? Try not to use the word “accident” when describing injury-causing events in patient charts, case presentations, research papers, or prevention programs. Instead, use terms such as motor vehicle collision (MVC), industrial injury, car-pedestrian collision, and unintentional fall. Although this request may sound strange, the Nova Scotia Trauma Program is one of a growing number of organizations seeking to ban the “A” word.


Injury is no accident: An awareness campaign

During the past year, the Nova Scotia Trauma Program, along with many of our partners has been actively engaged in a campaign to educate the media, public, trauma stakeholders regarding inappropriate usage of the word “accident”. Why, you might ask? An accident is an event which takes place without one’s foresight or expectation; an event which proceeds from an

unknown cause; an event without an apparent cause; is unexpected; is unexplained; is an act of God or the result of fate or bad luck.

When it comes to describing injuries, the facts make it clear that the word accident is misleading and not an appropriate description. Indeed, 95% of all injuries result from predictable and preventable circumstances. A good example of this is motor vehicle collisions. It is not an accident when someone who has been drinking crashes head-on into another vehicle. It is not an accident when someone decides to drive too fast for road or weather conditions and hits a tree. It is not an accident when someone is ejected from a vehicle because they were not wearing a seatbelt.

On the surface, this debate may seem trivial and may appear to be just another argument about political correctness. However, the Nova Scotia Trauma Program along with many others believes that without a change in the use of language around injury, efforts to prevent it will continue to be hampered. As long as people believe that injuries cannot be controlled (as implied by the word “accident”), they won’t stop to think about the risks in their lives and the ways they can mitigate them. We believe that over time, changing the way people perceive injuries will have a positive impact on our collective efforts to prevent them.

The Nova Scotia Trauma Program asks that you consider striking the word “accident” from your vocabulary of injury. For suggestions regarding alternative language, please visit the trauma program’s website: www.gov.ns.ca/health/ehs 

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Tragic, but no accident...

- When an impaired driver crashes her car and is ejected from the vehicle, her resulting death is no accident!
- When a young child, who is not wearing a helmet, smashes his ATV into a tree, the debilitating brain injury he sustains is no accident!
- When an elderly man trips on a crack in a poorly maintained sidewalk, the broken hip he receives is no accident!
- When a worker, who fails to secure herself with a safety harness, falls 30 feet from scaffolding at a construction site and sustains severe spinal cord injury, it is no accident!