MAKING WAVES IN THE WEST. A STUDY OF WATER SPORT RELATED INJURIES PRESENTING TO AN EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT IN THE WEST OF IRELAND

T.Breslin[1], K.Cunningham[2]
[1] Emergency Department, St. James' Hospital, Dublin 8, Ireland
[2] Emergency Department, Sligo General Hospital, Sligo, Ireland

Background

In recent years there has been a dramatic increase in water sport activity on the west coast of Ireland. The beaches on the west coast of Ireland boast some of the best surf in Europe and this natural resource is increasingly being used by both locals and tourists. The sports of surfing, windsurfing, kite surfing and sea kayaking are all growing in popularity. Last summer we noticed an increase in the number of patients attending our emergency department with water sport related injuries.

METHOD

Prospective study of all patients attending an Emergency Department on the west coast of Ireland with a water sport related injury over the 3 summer months from June to August 2004.

RESULTS

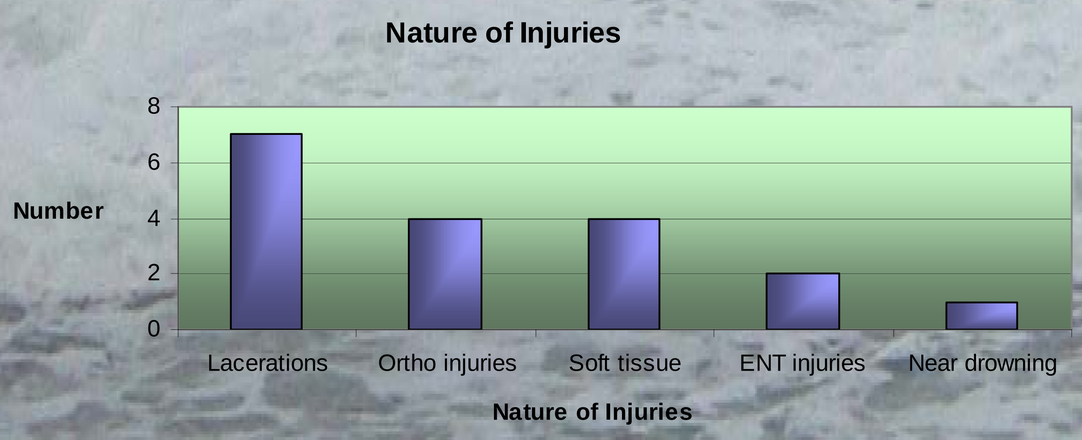
There were 18 watersport related injuries in the 3 months examined, comprising 15 male and 3 females.

Patients ranged in age from 14 to 35 years with a mean age of 25 years.

Half of the patients were from outside the locality, reflecting a large influx of surfers to the area during the holiday period.

2 patients required hospital admission.

The commonest injuries were lacerations, soft tissue injuries and orthopaedic injuries.



- There were 4 facial, 2 foot, and 1 finger laceration. These possibly reflect a lack of protective surf clothing to these areas.
- Orthopaedic injuries comprised 2 shoulder dislocations, a phalangeal fracture and a volar plate avulsion.
- There were soft tissue injuries to the neck, chest, shoulder and back. ENT injuries included a laryngeal haematoma, due to direct trauma from a surf board and a perforated eardrum, while water skiing.

Body Part Injured

Head and neck	8
Upper limb	6
Lower limb	2
Trunk	2

A near drowning happened in a 14 year old boy who was bodyboarding without a wetsuit and was washed out to sea before being rescued and airlifted to the hospital.

A number of preventable risk factors for injury were identified including: inexperience, lack of knowledge of local conditions, and inadequate or inappropriate equipment/protective surfwear.

CONCLUSION

Surf related and other watersport activity is increasing rapidly on the west coast of Ireland. Emergency departments serving our coastal areas are likely to see an increase in the number of presentations relating to these activities.

The presentation of injury in our study is similar to that of previous studies on surfing injury[1,2]. Most of the injuries were minor, but a number of episodes were associated with a significant risk of more serious injury or drowning. Our study also illustrates the key role of Emergency Departments in identifying local injury patterns and risks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The use of appropriate equipment must be emphasised to reduce the risk of injury, ie wetsuits, gloves, boots, helmets and bouyancy aids.
- Appropriate watersport training should be available and provided to all newcomers to surf sports.
- General water and surf safety promotion must be sustained in popular coastal regions.
- Local rescue services must be capable of responding to water sport accidents.
- Local data such as this can be used to inform local injury prevention initiatives.

References

1. Nathanson A, Haynes P, Kelly Tam Singh, Galanis D, Surfing Injuries, American Journal of Emergency Medicine, 20:155-160,2002.
2. Lowdon B, Paterman N, Pittman A, Surfboard-riding injuries, Med.J.Australia 2:613-616, 1983.