



More Electric Scooters, More Injuries in D.C.?

One Arlington hospital has seen an uptick in injuries as more people use electric scooters and dockless bikes

By Katelyn Newman

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GETTING AROUND THE nation's capital is becoming easier with more electric scooters and bikes on the streets, but one expert says her hospital is also experiencing a rise in scooter-related injuries, possibly because people don't know how to safely operate them.

In December, Washington, D.C.'s Department of Transportation announced plans to expand the number of "equitable transportation options" in 2019 by permitting 10 electric bicycle and scooter companies to operate in the District. The expansion would more than double the number of shareable vehicles, from a maximum of 2,400 in 2018 to up to 6,000. As of May 1, nearly 5,000 dockless bikes and scooters were permitted in D.C., news outlet Curbed reported.

Taryn Overman, associate vice president for emergency services at Virginia Hospital Center in Arlington says that as the weather warms, physicians in her hospital's emergency department report more and more cases of injuries related to electric scooters, ranging from scrapes and road rash to fractures, dislocations and brain bleeds.

A year ago, "we really hadn't noticed anything coming through our emergency department," she says. "But I queried the staff recently, and they said there is a definite increase in scooter-related injuries as it's becoming warmer. It's anecdotal, but typically we're seeing anywhere between three to five a week over the last several months."

Overman spoke to U.S. News about the need for public awareness about electric scooters. The following interview has been edited for length and clarity.



Taryn Overman, associate vice president for emergency services at Virginia Hospital Center in Arlington. (CHIA CHI CHANG/ VIRGINIA HOSPITAL CENTER)

What are the most common injuries related to e-scooters?

Anywhere from very minor injuries – cuts, bumps, bruises, scrapes, a little bit of road rash from falling off the scooter – all the way up to injuries that require admission to the hospital, (such as) a head bleed, an arterial bleed, and then quite a few dislocations and fractures that may or may not require surgery, depending on the severity of the injury. The dislocations can be anything from ankle dislocation to shoulder dislocation, fractures such as ankle, wrist or collarbone fractures.

Why do you think more people are getting injured now?

I think there are more people out after work. There's definitely more visitors in town that are more active in the evening. We are also seeing (scooters) become a mode of transportation that might be taken while trying to bar hop. We have seen injuries where the patient has been drinking, and that could have contributed to the injury. People jump on the scooter, and they've never used one before, and they go right to the scooter's max speed and they fall off. If you don't know what you're using, and you don't get comfortable with the equipment, there's a higher likelihood of injury. I think the public really needs to take time to educate themselves on the piece of equipment they're using and take the right precautions to keep themselves safe.

How can people ride more safely?

One of the key things that we've talked about with our patients is proper footwear. We see people wearing flip flops, flat shoes or high heels. We want people to wear a rubber soled shoe that's going to stay on their feet if they were to fall off. We see the shoes fly off and then they have all kinds of injuries to their feet because their feet weren't protected. A helmet is recommended when you're riding these because you do fall from standing height, and you could be going 10, 15 miles an hour on the scooter – that can create a scenario where a severe injury can happen.

What would you like people to know about dockless scooters?

We just have to use technology responsibly. Anything that we're using improperly has a risk to it. So, if the public learns how to responsibly use this equipment, it really does have a place in our society. We just have to do the right education and make sure that people understand their risk, so that they are better prepared to operate the equipment in a safe manner.