

Don't Rush...

By Elyse Cain

Human tragedy is everywhere and moves from our roads to our hospitals. In 2010 more than 23,000 people were killed or injured in accidents on NSW roads. A number of these people will never regain their former quality of life due to the extent of their injuries.

For AMA (NSW) Councillor Professor Brian Owler, a recent weekend on-call for neurosurgery at the Children's Hospital at Westmead marked the point at which he decided enough was enough. "It was a weekend of carnage on the roads with eight deaths including two children.

"While the ED and ICU team were resuscitating one child in the CT scan room, I could see Mum and Dad also in the room looking on. Mum kept reaching out to her dying son while Dad sobbed on her shoulder. They were in agony. There was nothing we could do to save their child and he died in his Mum and Dad's arms.

"Like lots of hospital doctors I get exposed to more human tragedy than most but for some reason this made me pause and think," Professor Owler says.

"There were two things that struck me that particular weekend. Firstly, if people could see what we as doctors see they might change their behaviour on the roads. Secondly, the accidents of that weekend were the result of poor decisions – probably split-second ones. The wrong decision can have devastating consequences not only for the driver but for family, friends and others on the road."

Unfortunately this is an all too common story. The tragic impact of these incidents frequently witnessed in operating theatres prompted Professor Owler to contact the NSW Government late last year about a campaign to send the public an

extremely important message: **Don't Rush.** "I hoped that by getting this message across from a medical perspective people may think twice about the choice they make on the roads," Professor Owler says.

Despite the sombre message of the **Don't Rush 2010** campaign, filming the television advertisements for the campaign proved to be an experience for Professor Owler. "I had only seen the script that morning...it took around six hours to film and many takes but we got there in the end. The crew were very patient with an amateur!" Even more surreal is having his face plastered on billboards across the state. "Thank God for Photoshop!" Professor Owler quips.

While Don't Rush is only one part of an overall strategy, Professor Owler commends the dedicated people at the RTA and Centre for Road Safety for their hard work. "I am grateful to the Minister for Roads, Mr David Borger and the staff at the RTA for understanding the message from the profession that we tried to convey as the message is always stronger coming from the profession rather than the individual. I'm also grateful to the AMA (NSW) Council and Secretariat for their support of the campaign."

When asked what he hopes to achieve through **Don't Rush**, Professor Owler's response is simple: "To reduce the road toll and number of people injured on our roads.

"I want this campaign to make people think about their behaviour on the roads not only in relation to speeding but also to reduce risk-taking behaviour. People need to understand the possible consequences of their behaviour and of their choices. Hopefully they will choose wisely."



The road toll for the 2010 was down to 421 compared to 453 in 2009, the lowest toll figure since 1945. Minister for Roads, David Borger said there were 535 fewer major crashes over this holiday period compared to last year, resulting in almost 200 fewer injuries.