

STAYING HEALTHY ON THE FARM

Chris Henry
Rural GP

Injuries and illnesses on the farm

Injuries

- A big problem - 2008-2013 200,000 work days lost.
- Dairy farming has highest injury rate; above forestry.
- Big seasonal peak for all accidents July and August - likely impact of fatigue; shift work, heavy work.
- Quad bikes, average 5 deaths 500 injuries per year, only 10% head injuries
- Suicide a much bigger issue, approximately 22 deaths a year, also seasonal peaks May and October.

Illness

- Less data available comparing rural and urban.
- Common illnesses: Respiratory, musculoskeletal, respiratory, skin infections and cancer. Increasing cardiovascular disease as farmers are less physically active.
- 2014-2015 Pitt Stop survey of farmers: 70% high cholesterol, 50% high blood pressure, 70% overweight- this is a BIG cardiovascular problem emerging; urgent need to address diet and increase exercise.
- As farmers get older 70% back pain, 50% neck pain; need to work smarter.
- Leptospirosis; often under diagnosed, potentially serious (remember Steve Gurney?). Simple prevention measures such as covering wounds do work. Symptoms similar to severe flu; can be treated with antibiotics, remind your Dr or nurse.

Notes:

Barriers to getting help

- Traditional culture of being tough and uncomplaining does not help!
- Nearly everything is easier to treat early.
- ACC sets strict time limits for lodging injuries.
- Access difficulties and health workforce crisis in rural areas are a major problem.

Community solutions

- Building healthy rural communities is vital; whole rural sector needs to work together.
- We need to maintain rural workforce and improve access with flexible hours, good after hours' service, and by using technology.
- Good connectivity, phone and internet, is ESSENTIAL. Telemedicine offers fantastic opportunities for isolated rural families and communities but needs good internet.
- Everyone needs to advocate for good rural health and social services, demanding equity with urban population.

Individual solutions - what can you do now?

- Book a check up
- Plan some exercise, being busy is not the same as being active.
- Clean out fridge and think about your diet

What can you do in next few weeks?

- Look at Health and Safety regulations, not perfect but there to protect you and your work force.
- Immunise yourself and your staff.
- Speak out about access and rural workforce whenever you can.
- Seek help early for yourself and anyone around you with signs of anxiety, stress or depression.