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LA BioMed Study Finds Higher Survival Rate Among Intoxicated Trauma Patients

LOS ANGELES (Oct. 1, 2009) – Trauma patients who were intoxicated before their injuries were more likely to survive than trauma patients who suffered similar injuries but were sober at the time, according to a study published in the October edition of *The American Surgeon* that was conducted by researchers at the Los Angeles Biomedical Research Institute at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center (LA BioMed).

The researchers surveyed 7,985 trauma patients of similar age and with similar injuries to determine if the consumption of alcohol prior to injury affected outcome. The study found 7 percent of the sober patients died compared to just 1 percent of the patients who had been drinking.

“This study is not encouraging the use of alcohol,” said Christian de Virgilio, MD, LA BioMed’s principal investigator for the study. “It is seeking to further explore earlier studies that had found alcohol may improve the body’s response to severe injuries. If alcohol is proven to improve the body’s response to traumatic injury, it could lead to treatments that help patients survive and recover more quickly.”

Alcohol consumption is already known to be one of the leading causes of accident and injury, with a previous study finding it contributes to about one-third of all trauma-related deaths. Previous studies found trauma patients who had abused alcohol for a long period of time had lower survival rates. But recent studies also found alcohol consumption may protect against death by changing the chemical response to injury.

“This study adds further support to the possibility that alcohol could be altering the body’s response to injury in a way that helps ensure survival,” said Dr. de Virgilio. “Given these findings, more research is needed to determine if there is some role for alcohol in the management of trauma patients.

Copies of the study, “Elevated Blood Alcohol Level May Be Protective of Trauma Patient Mortality,” may be obtained by contacting Laura Mecoy, Lmecoy@issuesmanagement, 310.546.5860.

About LA BioMed

Founded in 1952, LA BioMed at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center is one of the country’s largest nonprofit independent biomedical research institutes. It conducts biomedical research, trains young scientists and provides community services, including childhood immunization and nutrition assistance. The institute’s researchers conduct studies in such areas as cardiovascular disease, emerging infections, cancer, diabetes, kidney disease, dermatology, reproductive health, vaccine development, respiratory disorders, inherited illnesses and neonatology. LA BioMed is academically affiliated with the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA. For more information, please visit our website at www.LABioMed.org