

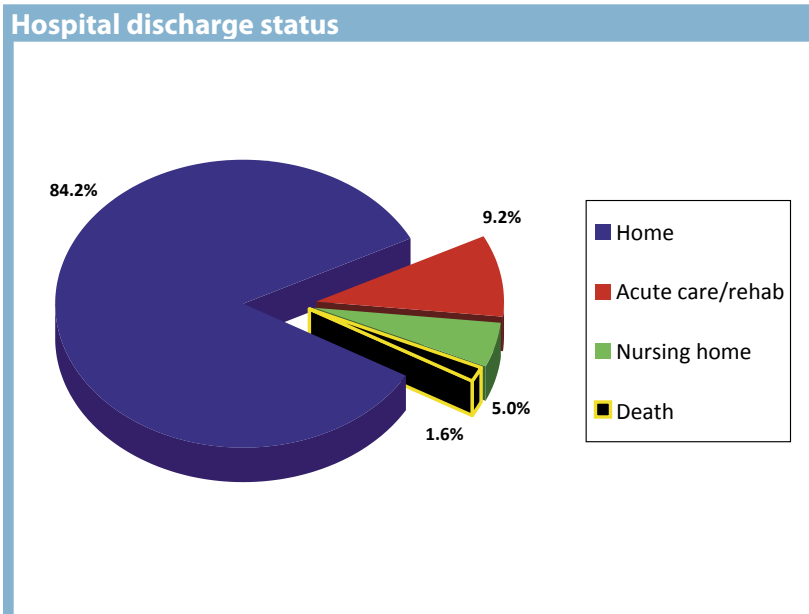
NTDB® data points

Going downhill

by Richard J. Fantus, MD, FACS

Last month's column reported on the exciting sport of snowboarding and its related injuries.^{*} However appealing that sport may seem, alpine skiing remains, by far, the most popular snow sport, and accounts for approximately two-thirds of those individuals on ski slopes. Ski technology made a major advancement in the mid-1990s with the development of "carved" or "shaped" skis. Taking a page from the snowboarder's playbook, ski manufacturers realized that by narrowing the ski in the center, similar to the design of a snowboard, it would lend itself to easier turning, as well as make it easier for beginners to learn how to ski. Today, almost all skis are designed this way. That design enhancement, along with improved binding systems, ski leashes, slope design, grooming, and improved signage, has led to a significant reduction in ski-related injury. For the most part, skiing is safe. Ski injury studies were first reported in the 1970s, and, since that time, injury rates have decreased approximately 50 percent, to two injuries per thousand skier days, a rate that is fairly consistent worldwide (<http://www.ski-injury.com/specific-sports/alpine>).

*Fantus RJ, NTDB data points: Double McTwist 1260. *Bull Am Coll Surg.* 2009;94(6):59-60.



In order to examine the occurrence of skiing-related injuries in the National Trauma Data Bank® research dataset 2008, admissions records were searched utilizing the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision, Clinical Modification (ICD-9-CM) cause of injury code E885.3 (skiing), E884.9 (jump), and E847 (lift or tow with chair or gondola). A total of 20,197 incidents matched this E code; 17,345 records had discharge status recorded, including 14,597 discharged to home, 1,603 to acute care/rehab, and 859 sent to nursing homes; 286 died (these data are depicted in the

figure on this page). These patients were 71 percent male, on average 34.9 years of age, had an average length of stay of 4.4 days, and an average injury severity score of 8.8. Of the 4,782 tested for alcohol, more than 30 percent were found to be positive.

When skiers head to the slopes, they should try and stay on piste (on the trail or route), watch out for tree wells (an area of loose snow around the trunk of a tree which becomes surrounded by deep snow), know their physical limits, and make sure the only beverage consumed on the ski slope is hot chocolate. Going downhill

is hard enough to take when you are sober.

Throughout the year, we will be highlighting these data through brief reports that will be found monthly in the *Bulletin*. The NTDB *Annual Report 2009* is available on the ACS Web site as a PDF file and a PowerPoint presentation at <http://www.ntdb.org>. In addition, information is available

on our Web site about how to obtain NTDB data for more detailed study. If you are interested in submitting your trauma center's data, contact Melanie L. Neal Manager, NTDB, at mneal@facs.org.

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