
NTDB® data points

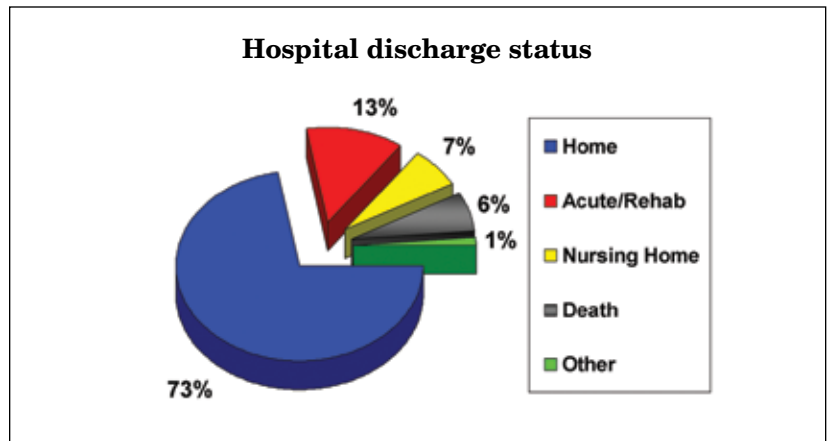
Who let the dogs out?

by Richard J. Fantus, MD, FACS, Chicago, IL, and John Fildes, MD, FACS, Las Vegas, NV

Every year, 2 percent of Americans, almost 5 million people, suffer dog bite injuries, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This leads to 800,000 injuries requiring medical attention and overall losses associated with dog bites exceeding \$1 billion per year. In a seven-year period during the 1990s, the number of dogs in the U.S. rose by 2 percent while the number of bites increased by 33 percent. Unfortunately, children are the most frequent targets, with the majority of attacks happening at home or in a familiar place, and more than three-fourths of the dogs belong to the victim's family or a friend.

Vicious dog attacks have become a common occurrence in the news. Almost weekly, somewhere in the U.S., reporters are covering these events, singling out one or two breeds as evil killers. Although pit bull mixed breeds and rottweilers are the top two breeds most likely to kill and seriously maim people, fatal attacks over the past 30 years have been attributed to dogs from at least 30 breeds.

Why does man's best friend turn on him? A dog that is treated harshly or trained to attack may bite a person. A dog of any breed can be turned into a dangerous dog. Often the owner is responsible for this type of behavior, not the breed nor the



individual dog. An owner who is responsible can win the respect and love of a dog no matter what breed it may be. Any individual dog may be a good, loving pet even though its breed may be likely to bite. Irresponsible owners may create unsafe situations with their pets, placing others in jeopardy even though the breed is considered tame.

To examine the occurrence of these injuries in the National Trauma Data Bank® Dataset 5.0, we used cause of injury code E 906.0, dog bite. There were 2,493 records with 1,798 being discharged to home, 324 to acute care/rehab, 172 to nursing homes, 37 other, and 162 deaths. These data are depicted in the figure on this page. This group of patients had an average length of hospital stay of over five days, an intensive care

unit length of stay of one and one-half days, and an average injury severity score of 9.8.

Dogs are lovable and obedient animals when treated with respect and love. Acting kindly and maintaining a sensible environment will minimize the risk of dog bites. Then the public will not have to worry about “who let the dogs out.”

Throughout the year, we will be highlighting these data through brief monthly reports in the *Bulletin*. The full NTDB *Annual Report Version 5.0* is available on the ACS Web site as a PDF file and a PowerPoint presentation at <http://www.ntdb.org>.

If you are interested in submitting your trauma center's data, contact Melanie L. Neal, Manager, NTDB, at mneal@facs.org.