

Hospitals see uptick in cycling injuries



A cyclist gets air at the
Bijou Bike Park.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

On opening day of Bijou Bike Park people were calling it the “bone yard” even though no ambulances were needed.

The description had to do with the tricked out features and the potential for injury.

Hospitals in the U.S. saw the number of bike injuries double between 1998 and 2013, according to the American Medical Association. And it’s not just young people who are getting hurt; the biggest increase was for those 45 and older.

When it comes to cycling deaths, fewer children died in the last four decades, while deaths for those between the ages of 35 and 45 tripled, according to Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.

Barton Memorial Hospital is not seeing quite the same trend with injuries. In 2012 the South Lake Tahoe facility recorded 63 hurt cyclists where trauma care was activated or the patient was transferred for additional care. That number does

not include minor or non-trauma injuries. There were 41 in 2013 and 66 in 2014.

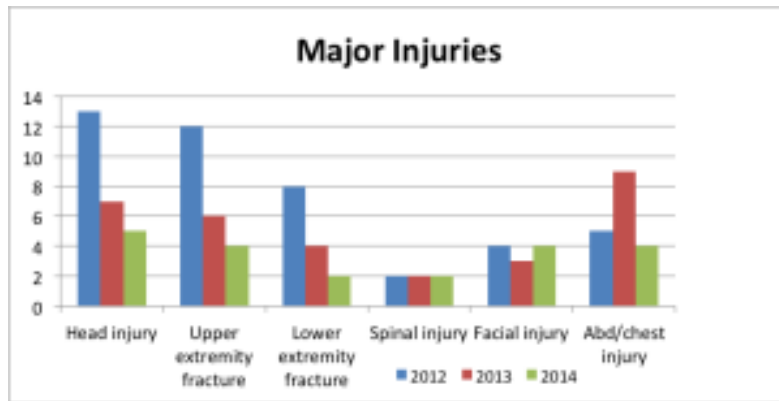
Of those injuries the ages are broken down as follows:

	2012	2013	2014	
0-10	7	1	6	
11-20	11	4	10	
21-30	6	18	8	
31-40	12	5	8	
41-50	12	3	12	
51-60	9	6	14	
61-70	5	2	7	
71-80	1	2	1	
Total	63	41	66	

“Riding a bike properly fitted to an individual can reduce crash potential as well as musculoskeletal problems. Not having proper conditioning or training relative to the demands of the trail or road ride chosen can certainly increase chances of an accident. For example, if someone is severely taxed by the uphill portion of a mountain bike ride, their agility and reaction time is likely to be affected on the downhill portion where speed increases and quick reactions are important,” Lance Orr, Barton emergency physician and medical director of the Emergency Department, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

In 2012 and 2013 about three-fourths of the injuries were sustained by men. That number grew to 80 percent in 2014.

Barton is seeing fewer head injuries because more people are wearing helmets. Still, they are the predominant injury.



Source: *Barton Health*

"A large percentage of road bike accidents involve vehicles and these accidents can be severe," Orr said. "From my perspective as an emergency medicine physician, a fair number of bicycle accidents that occur in town involve consumption of alcohol on the part of the rider. That is an uncommon issue for the distance road biker or typical mountain biker."

Equipment beyond a helmet can be helpful when mountain biking. Even some of the people at the bike park are wearing pads.

"Padded equipment and full face helmets can reduce injuries even for the average rider provided vision and mobility are not impaired by the equipment," Orr said. "Sometimes using additional equipment can have the opposite effect and lead riders to feel they can tackle a ride they previously felt was beyond their ability level."

Locals had been dominating the Barton ER visits, but that changed in 2014 when 59 percent of the injuries occurred to visitors. In 2012, it was 63 percent locals in the ER with bike injuries, and 68 percent in 2013.

First aid kits are not common among cyclists, so treating wounds immediately doesn't always happen.

"I always carry a roll of white athletic tape. You can tape up cuts with it and, if you know, you can fashion a splint using sticks," Lars Ensign, a Barton ER doc, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The doctors recommend using clean water to wash out abrasions or lacerations.

When it comes to learning what to do on the trails, the docs recommend a clinic, watching YouTube videos and progressing on courses – like the multi-level Bijou Bike Park.