

Centre for Restorative Neuroscience,
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College London

Dr David J Sharp
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Research Professor,

10th June 2014

To Deputy John Young, Chair of the Environment Scrutiny Panel

Re. Introduction of cycle helmet legislation in Jersey

Dear Sirs,

I was delighted to learn that in March 2010 members of the States of Jersey Assembly had voted overwhelming in favour of the introduction of a compulsory cycle helmet law for children. This was a significant and important development that will, in my professional opinion, better protect the island's children from the risk of sustaining lifelong disabilities as a result of head injury.

It is my understanding that the Bill is the subject of a scrutiny review.

I am a National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Professor at Imperial College London, and consultant neurologist. I lead neurology input into the traumatic brain injury service, and am the Brain Sciences Chair in the Centre for Translational Medicine at Imperial College & Deputy Head of the Centre for Restorative Neuroscience. My research interest is in traumatic brain injury, and I investigate the causes for the persistent disability that head injury often produces. I have almost 50 peer reviewed publications in the area and currently hold around £5 million in research funding. I am in a position to provide an expert medical opinion on the importance of this proposed legislation. It is my understanding that the organisations opposed to this Bill are not medical experts.

Our brains are incredibly delicate and prone to injury. The true impact of long-term impact of traumatic brain injury is only now being appreciated. Whilst many people seem to think that only a major trauma will lead to significant injury to the brain, the reality is that even a minor injury can have a major impact. Therefore, anything that can limit damage to the brain by protecting it from the effects of impact will have a significant effect on a patient's outcome. Cycle helmets achieve both of these objectives.

There is no convincing evidence that the introduction of helmets has a significant negative effect of cycling rates. Therefore, the argument that the protective effects of wearing a helmet is outweighed by the overall health impact of reductions in cycling is spurious.

Traumatic brain injury can devastate lives. The States Assembly has an opportunity to lead the way in protecting its children from unnecessary risks. Nothing has changed since the Assembly voted so convincingly to introduce this important piece of legislation, aside from the fact that many more people are likely to have sustained brain injuries as a result of cycling accidents in the past four years.

As an expert in traumatic brain injury, I urge you and your colleagues to support this proposition and introduce this life-saving legislation.

Yours sincerely,

Professor David J Sharp
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