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Press Release

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American College of Surgeons lists ways to improve state trauma system *Unintentional injuries are third leading cause of death in Alaska*

(Anchorage, AK) — The state Department of Health and Social Services invited the American College of Surgeons to study the state's trauma system this week and provide recommendations for improving it.

“Unintentional injuries are the third leading cause of death in Alaska, second only to cancer and heart disease,” said Dr. Jay Butler, Alaska's Chief Medical Officer. “It is the leading cause of death in people ages 1 to 44 in Alaska.”

Improving trauma care is a department priority. A visiting group from the College of Surgeons, a scientific and educational organization for surgeons, said a comprehensive trauma system is an “essential part of a public safety net.” Trauma care can help save lives and prevent devastating outcomes that threaten quality of life and ability to work for many Alaskans every year.

Alaska's injury-related death rates are higher than in other parts of the country, Butler said. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that unintentional injuries — such as injuries caused by car accidents and drowning — were the fifth most common cause of death for United States residents of all ages in the most recent statistics. In 2006, 487 Alaskans died from all types of injuries, which accounted for almost 15 percent of Alaska's 3,312 deaths that year.

The visiting group from the American College of Surgeons held a hearing at an Anchorage hotel Sunday that included professionals who deliver trauma care in all parts of the state. The group also interviewed surgeons, emergency physicians, pediatric specialists, nurses and other professionals. The group presented on Wednesday a sample of its recommendations to improve Alaska's trauma care:

- develop a coordinated state trauma system and hire a full-time, permanent trauma system manager;

- improve the integration of the state's emergency medical services and emergency preparedness and response programs;
- assist hospitals faced with uncompensated costs that go along with improving their readiness to handle Alaska's trauma needs;
- develop a central coordination center for medical aircraft used in Alaska and monitor the availability and location of such aircraft at all times; and
- study pediatric trauma care needs and create one or more Centers of Excellence for pediatric trauma care.

The American College of Surgeons will issue a final report with about 70 recommendations in two months.

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