

**Commentary on:** Schmitt MW, Williams TL, Woodard KR, Harruff RC. Trends in suicide by carbon monoxide inhalation in King County, Washington: 1996–2009. *J Forensic Sci* 2011; Feb 3. doi: 10.1111/j.1556-4029.2010.01688.x [Epub ahead of print].

Sir,

I read with interest the article by Schmitt et al. (1), suggesting that there has been an increase in suicidal deaths by charcoal-produced carbon monoxide (CO) in King County, Washington since the use of this method was highly publicized in Asia in 1998. I work just down the street from the article's authors at a different hospital which houses the region's referral center for hyperbaric oxygen treatment of individuals with severe CO poisoning. In their article, they imply that the county's relatively large Asian population is somehow related to the increase in charcoal suicide, yet only one of their 26 cases was Asian (4%). Further, there does not appear to be any increase in their cases for at least 5 years following that specific 1998 case in Hong Kong.

We have treated 38 patients for nonfatal intentional charcoal CO poisoning since 1982. Of them, 22 were treated from 1982 to 1997 and 16 from 1998 to 2009. Among the 38, only four (11%) were Asian and all attempted suicide prior to 1998. As in Schmitt's series, Asians are actually underrepresented in our experience

relative to their proportion in the county population (14% in 2009, US Census Bureau).

At least in the case of severe nonfatal intentional charcoal CO exposure in our region, there is no evidence of an increase in either total or specifically Asian race cases in the past decade. I speculate that the observed increase in suicidal deaths from 0–2 per year from 1996 to 2004 to 1–6 per year from 2005 to 2009 has nothing to do with King County's Asian population. While there may be a slight increase in fatal cases recently, it is difficult for me to understand how this could be related to the local Asian community.

#### Reference

1. Schmitt MW, Williams TL, Woodard KR, Harruff RC. Trends in suicide by carbon monoxide inhalation in King County, Washington: 1996–2009. *J Forensic Sci* 2011;Feb 3. doi: 10.1111/j.1556-4029.2010.01688.x [Epub ahead of print].

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