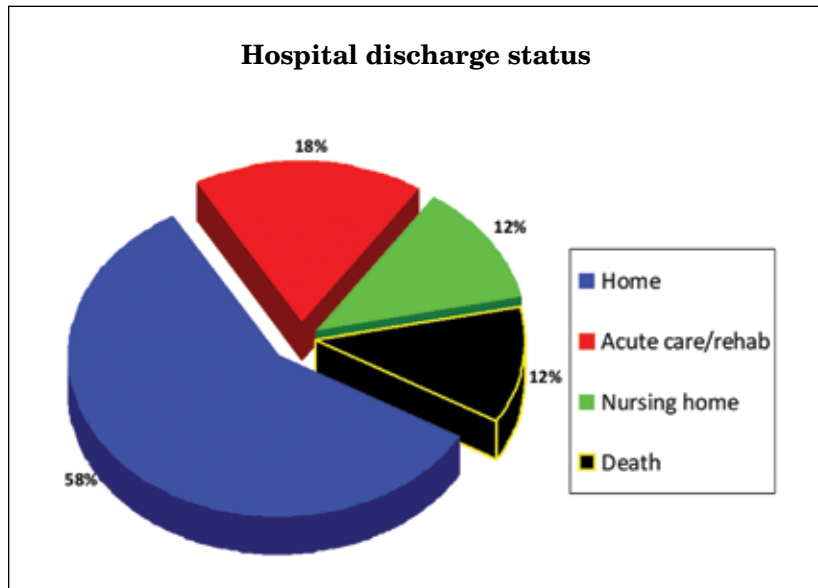

NTDB® data points

Planes, trains, and automobiles

by Richard J. Fantus, MD, FACS

When people think of a train ride, various images come to mind. Some may think back to the glamorous travels of the *Orient Express*, which began service from Paris to Istanbul in 1883, crossing six different countries while enlisting the cooperation of 10 different railroads. Passengers, who were often diplomats, government couriers, or royalty, dined on fine, five-course French meals. Or perhaps what comes to mind are the more mundane travels of the *City of New Orleans*, an Illinois Central train running between Chicago and New Orleans. While riding on this train in 1970, Steve Goodman wrote the famous folk song popularized by Arlo Guthrie, relating the images that he saw through the window of the club car while he played cards as his wife slept, on their way to visit his in-laws. Living just 2 miles from the site of the largest train robbery in U.S. history, which netted the bandits \$3 million one June day in 1924, I can't help but think of all the train robberies that have taken place over the years and how they may have contributed to an increase in passenger fatalities.

The airline industry has the lowest passenger fatality rate of the four major modes of travel. While highway travel by personal vehicle represents the greatest risk of death,



train travel is a safe mode of passenger conveyance and is closer to air travel, in terms of safety. In 2008, trains carried almost 600 million passengers over 18 billion miles, with only 24 passenger deaths (<http://safetydata.fra.dot.gov/officeofsafety/publicsite/Query/statsSas.aspx>). According to the National Safety Council, passenger transportation incidents account for approximately 30 percent of unintentional injury deaths. The U.S. passenger fatality rate per 100 million passenger miles is 0.01 for air travel, 0.04 for both railroad and bus travel, and 0.78 for

passenger automobiles (<http://www.airlines.org/economics/safety+stats/>).

In order to examine the occurrence of all train-related injuries in the National Trauma Data Bank® research dataset 2007 admissions records were searched utilizing the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision, Clinical Modification cause of injury code E800–E807 (railway accidents). 331 incidents matched these E codes and of these, 292 records had discharge status recorded, including 170 discharged to home and 52 to acute care/rehabilitation; 36

were sent to nursing homes, and 34 died (see Figure on page 44). These patients were 81 percent male and, on average, 36.8 years of age; they had an average length of stay of 12.8 days, and an average injury severity score (ISS) of 15.7. Of those tested or suspected for alcohol, more than 40 percent tested positive. When comparing the overall group versus the pedestrian-only group reported in last month's *Bulletin* (pages 63–64), pedestrian rail injuries had a longer length of stay, higher average ISS, and higher mortality rate.

We are fortunate to live dur-

ing a time when there are several options for travel. We can take planes, trains, and automobiles to get from one destination to the next. No matter what your mode of transportation, as you travel across the U.S., take time to look out of the window and enjoy the scenery. Perhaps you, too, will be inspired to pen the lyrics for a great folk song.

The full NTDB *Annual Report Version 8.0* is available on the ACS Web site as a PDF 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.

Acknowledgment

The author acknowledges the assistance of Chrystal Price, data analyst, NTDB, in the preparation of this column.

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