

Gunshot wounds hit SA where it hurts

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South Africa could be spending up to R200-million a year just on treating people with serious abdominal gunshot wounds, researchers say in the latest South African Medical Journal.

Dr Denis Allard, a surgeon at Cape Town's GF Jooste Hospital, and University of Cape Town professor of medicine Dr Vanessa Burch, say in a paper that this amount does not include the cost of gunshot injuries to other parts of the body.

Their estimate is based on extrapolation from a study of wounds at GF Jooste, a state hospital on the violence-wracked Cape Flats.

They found that over a seven-month period, surgeons at Jooste did an average of one emergency laparotomy - surgical entry into the abdominal cavity - a week for firearm injuries.

On average, each of the 21 patients treated at Jooste from admission to discharge cost the state health service about R10 269.

This, the researchers said, was 13 times government's per capita health spending.

"Not only does the firearm-related trauma burden in South Africa exceed national fiscal resources, but it also threatens to exceed human medical staff resources," they warn.

They say the allocation of resources to firearm trauma "may ultimately compromise the care of non-trauma patients competing for access to the same health care resources".

They also say these costs raise the question of the need for violence prevention programmes. - Sapa