POSITION STATEMENT ON CONCUSSION IN YOUTH SPORTS

The American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (AAPM&R) is the national medical society representing more than 8,000 physiatrists - physicians who are specialists in the field of physical medicine and rehabilitation. With a focus on restoring function, physiatrists treat children and adults. Physiatrists treat persons with acute and chronic pain, acute sports injuries including concussion as well as chronic injury, persons who have experienced catastrophic events resulting in paraplegia, quadriplegia, or traumatic brain injury, musculoskeletal injuries, and individuals with neurologic disorders such as stroke, multiple sclerosis, or any other disease process that results in impairment and/or disability. PM&R physicians treat any disability resulting from disease, sports-related activities or injury involving any organ system and their goal is to decrease pain and enhance performance without surgery. AAPM&R strongly supports public policies that reduce injuries, including concussions, in youth sports.

Since 2008, several compelling factors have advanced the need for important national advocacy around concussion policies and state laws in the U.S. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, annually “traumatic brain injuries contribute to a substantial number of deaths and cases of permanent disability.”

Recent data shows that, on average, approximately 1.6 to 3.8 million people sustain sports and recreation concussions annually. Concussions are a common type of sports injury and usually represent a functional disturbance of brain activity. Most sports concussions improve over time, but if mismanaged, a sports concussion can have long term, disabling consequences, and in some cases even be deadly. Concussions have a significant impact on the health and function of individuals and society.

Advocating for Patients

As specialists in physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R), physiatrists play a pivotal role in advocating for quality patient care for America’s youth involved in all sports. Physiatrists treat patients with mild traumatic brain injuries, sports concussions and provide a unique functional approach to the management of musculoskeletal and neurological injury that sets them apart from other practitioners. Physiatrists have significant experience in managing the entire spectrum of issues that occur as a result of sports concussion, including physical, emotional and cognitive signs and symptoms, as well as assessing academic concerns in the


2 ibid
concussed youth-athlete population. AAPM&R would like to emphasize for public and school administrators that disabilities which affect a student's ability to perform academically, including those caused by head injuries, are already covered conditions under existing policies relating to support services and accommodations. Likewise, we encourage coordinated efforts by all stakeholders to enhance the safety of youth athletes through the development of laws and policies that offer optimal protections in addressing these concerns.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Consistent with its commitment to improving the health and safety of youth athletes while participating in sports activities, AAPM&R advocates for the following public sports concussion policies to help shape laws that are in the youth athletes’ best interests:

1. Require the development and dissemination of educational materials regarding sports concussions for athletes, parents or guardians and coaches;
2. Require any youth athlete who is suspected of sustaining a concussion or head injury be removed from play at the time of the suspected injury; and
3. Require that a youth athlete who has been removed from play receive written medical clearance prior to returning to play by a licensed healthcare provider trained in the evaluation and management of concussion.

LIST OF REFERENCES

http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/HeadsUp/schools.html

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L. T. Kohn; United States Government Accountability Office - Testimony before the Committee on Education and Labor; House of Representatives; Concussion in High School Sports.

Americans with Disabilities Act/Rehabilitation Act, and Department of Education Directives: http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transition.html

Powers Pyles Sutter & Verville PC, Attorneys at Law; Description and Analysis of EEOC’S Final Regulation Implementing the ADA Amendments Act of 2008.

Approved BOG 4/2011