

An Investigation of Interscholastic Athletic Trainer Documentation Practices of Concussions in a Two State Region

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Legal aspects

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(including questions)
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Relevance

It has been estimated that 67,000 high school football players are diagnosed with concussions every year (Broglio et al., 2009). In part, due to the litigious nature of our society, concussion has become a significant legal topic as states scurry to enact sport-related head injury legislation. As of May 2012, 40 states have enacted legislation pertaining to concussions and nine other states are currently considering concussion bills (Osborne & Ammon, 2012). Although the prevalence of concussions in high school football players has been reported to be higher than any other sport, there has been a lack of information analyzing how it is managed (McCrea, Hammeke, Olsen, Leo & Guskiewicz, 2004). The primary focus of this study is to analyze how concussions are documented at the interscholastic level. A secondary focus is to determine if a student-athlete goes on to compete at the intercollegiate level are their records being forwarded to the intercollegiate athletic trainers. This information will prove valuable to state high school athletic associations as well as state athletic trainer associations.

Relevant Literature

It has been established that adolescent athletes are susceptible to multiple concussions which could lead to tragic results (Castillo, 2011). However, uniform guidelines for the identification or post-concussion management of sport-related concussions of young athletes in North America do not exist (McCrary, Meeuwisse, Johnston, et al., 2009). Risk management strategies, especially proper record keeping, has been cited as being of the utmost importance in preventing athletes from suffering additional concussions (Rabadi & Jordan, 2001). When a student-athlete sustains a concussion in high school not only should it be documented, but this information should become part of a permanent medical file. The objective of this study was to analyze how interscholastic athletic trainers in the states of Texas and South Dakota managed concussion incidents of football players.

Methodology and Analysis

The subjects of this study were high school athletic trainers in Texas and South Dakota as identified by the National Athletic Trainers' Association and state athletic trainer associations. An online questionnaire was sent to the 365 high school football athletic trainers in Texas and the 186 trainers in South Dakota. With nearly 70% of the responses collected in this ongoing investigation, there has been a 36% response rate which is within an acceptable range for online surveys (Sheehan & McMillan, 1999). Descriptive statistics (i.e., frequencies and percentages) were used to report the individual state information.

Discussion/Implications

Fifty-nine percent of the respondents reported high school varsity members (usually juniors and seniors) suffered one to two concussions while 34% of the varsity football players had incurred three to four concussions during the previous season. Seventy-one percent of the trainers agreed that football players at their school had an undocumented history of concussions prior to participating on the football team. Moreover, 58% believed concussion documentation and concussion history has not been taken seriously in interscholastic athletics. However, 49% kept the medical records after a student-athlete is no longer participating in athletics for six to seven years while 26% kept such records for four to five years. Seventy-nine percent believed intercollegiate athletic trainers should request medical documentation regarding concussions if the athlete intends to participate in interscholastic sports. Yet, 85% had never been asked for this documentation by an interscholastic athletic trainer or representative of the university's medical personnel when their athletes continued to compete at the intercollegiate level.

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The national attention placed on the incidence of concussions and enacted state legislation further emphasizes the importance of properly documenting these injuries and passing this information along to future athletic administrators and medical staffs. To that end, proper identification, assessment, and documentation of concussions are significant components in effectively managing such risks in interscholastic sports. Without proper documentation athletes may incur multiple concussions resulting in traumatic brain injuries or death. These potential tragedies may result in an increase of subsequent litigation against high school administrators, coaches, trainers and medical personnel (Serrell v. Connetquot Central High School District, 2001).

References

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