



November 29, 2009

Concussion Safety Programs for Youth Hockey

Don Hisey of Ilderton, Ontario has partnered with Dr. Michael Czarnota, one of the foremost neuropsychology consultants, to bring enhanced concussion awareness and services to youth hockey teams throughout Ontario.

“We had several concussions on our team last season and as a coach and a parent I was very concerned about their health and well-being,” said Mr. Hisey. “I thought there must be something better out there to help young players and parents deal with concussions and that led me to Dr. Czarnota.”

Dr. Czarnota is the Concussion Consultant for the Ontario Hockey League, Western Hockey League and nearly 20 minor professional hockey teams from the SPHL to the AHL. “Concussion awareness is improving and proper management is being accepted more and more often as a necessary part of any contact sport.”

“We are taking a comprehensive approach,” said Mr. Hisey, “that includes educational materials for players, coaches and parents, access to ‘baseline’ neurocognitive testing and referrals to qualified local clinicians who can properly and thoroughly assess, manage and care for the injured athlete.”

Dr. Czarnota added: “Since concussions affect the way the brain operates, not the way it looks, gathering pre-injury information on a person’s thinking skills, like attention, memory and reaction time, is an invaluable tool in managing concussions. Once a concussion is suspected or diagnosed, the treating clinician can repeat similar tests and look for any declines that may have occurred. With any athlete – but especially with young athletes – you never want them doing much if they are still having symptoms from their concussion.”

Returning to play while still symptomatic carries increased risk for significant problems, such as persistent post-concussion symptoms and Second Impact Syndrome. Since everyone heals at their own rate each injury should be managed individually. Usually, rest from physical activity such as gym class and hockey practice is best and occasionally a brief rest from school may be recommended.

“Playing after a concussion should not be made into a toughness issue. The right thing to do – the smart thing to do – is to recognize it when it’s happened and deal with it properly,” said Dr. Czarnota. “For the vast majority of injuries, rest is best.”

Concussion is a complicated clinical issue that requires comprehensive care and is best managed using as many tools as possible. Neurocognitive testing has proven value when used in combination with complete clinical care but should not be used as the sole criterion in managing concussions and is not meant to replace clinical examination, experience and discretion.

“We believe that we have developed a high value, full-service approach that has been met with a lot of interest,” said Mr. Hisey. “We’ve been asked by a number of teams, clinics and doctor’s offices to help set up programs in their area.” A Concussion Safety Program can be implemented for a total annual cost of only CAN\$20 per athlete: it would provide pre-injury testing and all necessary post-injury evaluations to assist your physician in making the most sensitive determinations regarding recovery, school work and return to play. Parents can download additional information at no cost and be assured that their athlete has minimized the risk for further or compounded injury.

Please contact Don Hisey (dhisey@bell.net) with any questions or go to www.concussions.ca for more information.

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