

**NEWS FROM THEDACARE™**  
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
**August 7, 2008**

**COLLABORATION TAKES CONCUSSION ‘EPIDEMIC’ HEAD ON**  
***Statewide Group to Improve Education, Identification, Diagnosis and Treatment***

Seven medical organizations in Wisconsin, along with several advocacy groups and sports organizations, have created a statewide voluntary group committed to improving concussion care for athletes in the state.

The Wisconsin Sports Concussion Collaborative (WSCC) aims to promote the health, safety and academic performance of Wisconsin student-athletes and others by improving the education, identification, diagnosis and treatment of concussions.

“This collaboration is a national model,” said Kevin Walter, MD, program director of pediatric and adolescent sports medicine at Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin and a member of the medical advisory board for WIAA and the National Federation of State High School Associations. “It is exciting to work with other doctors who are very interested in concussions. In high school football in Wisconsin, 15 percent of the athletes will suffer a concussion in one year. That is about 4,000 to 5,000 kids, and that does not include other contact sports like soccer, wrestling, hockey or basketball. A concussion is a brain injury; injured athletes need to be seen by a doctor.”

The WSCC founding members include ThedaCare Orthopedics Plus in Appleton; UW Health-Sports Medicine in Madison; Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin in Milwaukee; Gundersen Lutheran in LaCrosse; Bellin Health-Sports Medicine in Green Bay; Froedtert Health-Sports Medicine in Milwaukee; and Ministry Health Care-Sports Medicine in Stevens Point. Recently the Collaborative added new members from Menomonie, Eau Claire and Wausau, and would like to add more members. Information on the group can be found at [www.WIsportsconcussion.org](http://www.WIsportsconcussion.org) on the web.

“Concussions in athletes are a much more serious problem than has been recognized in the past,” said Mark Hallett, MD, director of sports medicine for ThedaCare Orthopedics Plus. “We now recognize that getting your ‘bell rung’ is a brain injury that can take several days or more to heal. Recent studies show that they are more common and take longer to heal than previously thought; it is an epidemic. This can result in an increased risk of repeated concussions, prolonged symptoms, decreased academic performance, and potentially permanent disability. This should concern everyone associated with sports as well as organizations that deal with brain injuries.”

In addition to educational resources and a listing of trained health care providers, the Collaboration offers an online ImPACT™ concussion test readily available for use for baseline testing prior to an athlete’s participation. ImPACT is a computerized series of neurocognitive tests that help medical staff determine the severity of concussions and when it is safe for injured athletes to return to play. The ImPACT program has been adopted by team doctors and certified athletic trainers for numerous top sports leagues in the world, including the National Football League, National Hockey League and Major League Soccer.

Concussion is any change in mental status caused by a sudden violent rocking back and forth of the brain inside of the skull due to a blow to the head or upper body. Symptoms can include headache, amnesia, dizziness, confusion, lack of hand-eye coordination, and in some cases, loss of consciousness. Generally, an athlete can safely recover from an initial concussion as long as the brain has had time to heal. If a second concussion occurs prior to full recovery from the first, an athlete may experience long-term

symptoms in the form of chronic headaches, sleep difficulties, personality changes or memory problems. In rare cases, a second concussion may even result in death from second impact syndrome.

“This innovative tool is extremely beneficial to soccer athletes, coaches and parents and can help us objectively determine when full recovery from concussion has occurred,” said Peter Mariahazy, president of Wisconsin Youth Soccer Association. “By getting the baseline test of each athlete, the coaches and the parents know when it is safe to send the athlete back out onto the field. They may think they know, but this will tell them for sure. If an athlete had a sprained ankle, a coach would not send him or her out to play too soon and risk aggravating the injury. That should be the same with a concussion. You want to make sure the athlete is healed.”

ImPACT objectively measures multiple aspects of brain functions, including verbal memory, visual memory, processing speed, reaction time and post-concussive symptoms. In the pre-season, each athlete should take 20-30 minutes to complete a baseline test, which shows how the athlete’s healthy brain processes information. When a concussion is suspected, a follow-up test can be administered to see if the results have changed from the baseline. This comparison helps to more accurately diagnose and manage the concussion. Follow-up tests can be administered over days or weeks so that medical professionals and clinicians are able to continue to track the athlete's recovery from the injury.

“It is important to obtain accurate baselines so we understand where the athlete functions during normal day-to-day activities prior to sustaining a head injury,” said David Bernhardt, MD, with UW-Health’s Department of Pediatrics/Ortho & Rehab, Division of Sports Medicine. “If the athlete subsequently sustains a head injury, we can compare the two studies, which will not only help in determining clearance for return to play decisions but may also give us a picture of how the athlete may function in the classroom after the head injury.”

The Wisconsin Sports Concussion Collaborative and Wisportsconcussion.org is co-lead by Dr. Hallett, who serves as the medical director and lead physician, and Tracy McCormick, who serves as a concussion program consultant, sales and support specialist, and web master for the organization.

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