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UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH RESEARCHERS PRESENT TALKS AT SECOND INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON CONCUSSION IN SPORT, IN PRAGUE

Dr. Mark Lovell Will Co-Author Position Paper That Will Result From The Symposium

PRAGUE, Nov. 5, 2004 - Two University of Pittsburgh sports medicine concussion researchers have been invited to deliver three presentations this weekend at the Second International Symposium on Concussion in Sport, considered one of the most prestigious and important gatherings of experts in the world concerning sports concussion management.

The symposium, held Nov. 3 - 6 in Prague, Czech Republic, will result in the publication of a position paper that will be co-authored by Mark Lovell, Ph.D., a neuropsychologist and director of the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC) Sports Medicine Concussion Program. The position paper will summarize the international group's consensus and recommendations for the advancement of the best possible management of sports-related concussions in athletes of all levels, based on the presented scientific research findings.

The First International Symposium on Concussion in Sport, held in 2001 in Vienna, has proven to be one of the most important and most referenced meetings in the young specialty field of sports concussion management. The position paper issued from that meeting, also co-authored by Dr. Lovell, is still widely referenced today.

As with the first symposium, the current Prague gathering was organized by the International Ice Hockey Federation, Federation Internationale de Football, Association Medical Assessment and Research Centre and the International Olympic Committee Medical Commission.

UPMC Presentations:

"Sports-related concussion is arguably the most challenging condition to face the sports medicine practitioner on a day-to-day basis," said Dr. Lovell, whose first presentation will outline common neuropsychological effects of injury, based on research data of more than 500 professional and amateur athletes. "There is tremendous variability from athlete to athlete regarding post-injury signs and symptoms, and the brain mechanisms involved in injury and recovery historically have been poorly understood."

Studies during the past decade have led to the development of more advanced injury assessment technology and have enabled researchers to document that impairments involving attentional, multi-tasking and working memory systems within the brain are common following injury, according to Dr. Lovell. He also will discuss how research has shown that post-injury symptoms are dependent on factors such as the biomechanics of the injury, the athlete's history of prior concussions and genetic make-up.

Dr. Lovell's second presentation will discuss the development and refinement of neuropsychological testing methods over the past 20 years, including the evolution of the tests from a paper-and-pencil version -- a time-consuming and laborious method -- to those being done more quickly and efficiently on laptop computers. Dr. Lovell serves as the director of such testing for the National Football League and National Hockey League. He also is the developer of ImPACT (Immediate Post-concussion Assessment
and Cognitive Testing), the first and most widely used computerized concussion evaluation system in the world today.

In the third University of Pittsburgh presentation, Michael Collins, Ph.D., a neuropsychologist and assistant director of the UPMC Sports Medicine Concussion Program, will discuss recent research data proving that loss of consciousness is not a reliable predictor of injury severity or of recovery time, as was previously thought for many years. "Studies have shown that either retrograde or post-traumatic amnesia - not loss of consciousness -- is a much more potent predictor of injury outcome," said Dr. Collins. "This research data is important because traditionally used injury severity grading scales have relied on loss of consciousness as a criterion for injury severity. We are concerned that no current grading scale explicitly includes amnesia as a severity marker," he said.

"This analysis underscores the need for further refinement of currently used sports concussion symptom grading scales because almost all of them base injury severity and return-to-play recommendations on the presence of on-the-field loss of consciousness, not amnesia or other symptoms," added Dr. Collins.

The UPMC Sports Medicine Concussion Program, established in 2000, is an ongoing clinical service and research program that focuses on developing the best methods for evaluation and management of sports-related concussions in athletes of all levels. The program's internationally known team of researchers, led by Drs. Lovell and Collins, has published numerous groundbreaking studies results in major medical journals during the past several years concerning the effects of and recovery from concussion in high school and college athletes. These studies have had significant implications for commonly used return-to-play guidelines.

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