Health matters

TREATING CONCUSSION INJURIES IMPROVES

EL PASO — Playing sports, for fun or competitively, provides the opportunity to exercise and socialize with others. Many of us can look back with fondness when we remember playing the games we love. Some of us will never forget the day we, or someone we knew, were seriously injured playing a sport.

To help prevent injury, we have seen the development of better equipment, and an increased interest in the use of sports trainers, exercise physiologists, and sports medicine professionals. But would it surprise you to know that there is little research in the measurement and treatment of concussion injury?

Fortunately, this state of affairs is improving, especially when it comes to concussions.

Concussions — or brain injuries caused by a bump, blow or jolt to the head — have symptoms that are noticeable immediately, or may show up days or weeks after the injury.

Though it is commonly assumed that a loss of consciousness is a defining feature of a concussion, clinical experience and research findings indicated that a person can experience a concussion but remain conscious.

It is often impossible to determine the extent of an injury caused by a concussion. Physicians use medical scans, such as CTs or MRIs, to look for structural damage in the brain. These are excellent tools, but they do not show microscopic physical damages and are not designed to show metabolic changes that occur after a concussion.

To properly care for an athlete, it is imperative that the athlete be tested before the start of practice and scheduled games. If the athlete suffers a concussion during practice or a game, the evaluation will give medical professionals an understanding of the concussion’s impact on the athlete’s academic, social, personality and work skills.

Two or three days after the concussion, an athlete should be retested to determine the athlete’s ability to learn new information, remember verbal and visual information, and the athlete’s speed of processing information. Without prior testing, the diagnosis, prognosis and treatment of an athlete after a concussion is much more difficult.

The best way to prevent pre-concussion state. Even the mildest concussion can lead to the second impact syndrome, days or weeks after an initial concussion.

Athletes who have a concussion are at greater risk to receive another one if they are not properly treated. Currently it is recommended that athletes not return to play before symptoms of an initial head injury have resolved.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site reports 1.6 to 3.8 million sports- and recreation-related concussions occur in the United States each year. High-school football accounts for more than 60 percent of the reported concussions. For high-school females, the leading cause of concussion is soccer.

No matter what sport is played, it is imperative that athletes, athletic trainers and coaches, among others, be trained to recognize all the symptoms associated with even a mild concus-