

NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Leading Edge Concussion Evaluation and Treatment Possible for Local High School Athletes

ROME, GA, (Date) – Rome-area high school athletes may be better protected from concussion and brain injury this fall by the same program currently provided to college and professional athletes nationwide. The clinical program establishes base-line cognitive measures for each player. These are used by physicians to measure brain injury caused by concussion, prescribe treatment and determine when the player may return to competition.

The Sports Medicine Program of Harbin Clinic has offered to provide the program free for two years to Rome City, Floyd County and area private schools. Varsity athletes from all sports would participate. The offer to provide the program was made to school superintendents who are currently working with school athletic directors to determine if they will accept the offer.

According to Ken Davis, MD, Chief Executive Officer of Harbin Clinic, “Our Sports Medicine staff has worked for several months to become a regional certified

provider of ImPACT™ testing. ImPACT™ is the primary clinical concussion and head injury program for athletics in the United States. The certification required extensive training for our sports medicine doctors and staff, along with acquisition of equipment.”

The ImPACT™ concussion and brain injury prevention program is currently used by the National Football League, National Hockey League, almost all professional sports, and NCAA colleges. There is a national movement to expand the medical service to high schools and the Harbin Clinic is taking the lead to bring the program to Northern Georgia.

“Our offer to provide the service to the Floyd County and Rome City schools represents the realities of time and resources,” said Davis. “Harbin Clinic’s goal is to provide this service to high schools throughout the region and we will move as quickly as possible to expand the program.”

Base-line testing of athletics must be completed this school year for those who will participate in sports this fall. According to David Hale, M.D., Neurologist with Harbin Clinic Sport Medicine, “This program is widely used by colleges throughout the United States. If area schools accept Harbin’s offer, they will be the first in North Georgia to have this protection.”

The program, called ImPACT™, creates base-line cognitive record of the student’s brain using a simple computer test. If an athlete experiences a concussion/brain injury, the base-line study provides needed information to evaluate the extent of injury and progress of healing. “It will give concrete results determining if and when an athlete can return to activity and play,” Dr. Hale said.

The program requires all high school sports participants to take a cognitive function test by computer. This can be done in the school. Results of the test are considered an official medical record and are confidential. Only a physician treating an injury can access the results.

Harbin Clinic Orthopaedic Surgeon and Sport Medicine specialist, Brad Bushnell, M.D., is championing the effort. According to Bushnell, “It is difficult for physicians to treat concussions and brain injuries. We often see patients the following day and must base the evaluation on subjective information.

“The cognitive baseline established by this program gives us (the treating doctors) needed information to guide our treatment, evaluate the severity of the injury, and help determine when the individual can return to the sport. Research shows that the seriousness or damage from a second concussions is significantly increased if the prior injury has not healed,” Bushnell said.

According to Hale, “The focus of current research is elimination of guesswork in treating concussion.” Hales says it is important that parents, coaches and the athletes understand how to identify a concussion and the potential seriousness of the injury. Harbin Clinic Sports Medicine Program is committed to protecting athletes and providing those who have a head injury with the appropriate treatment that will help them fully recover.

Sidebar

Concussion Signs and Symptoms

According to the Sports Medicine Program at the Harbin Clinic, the following are signs of symptoms of concussion and brain injury:

1. If an athlete shows concussion-like signs and reports symptoms after a contact to the head, the athlete has, *at the very least*, sustained a mild concussion and should be treated for a concussion. The terms “ding” and “bell ringer” are discouraged, because they downplay the significance of the injury.
2. In addition to a thorough clinical evaluation, formal cognitive and postural-stability testing is recommended to assist in objectively determining injury severity and readiness to return to play. The Sports Medicine Program at Harbin Clinic recommends that high schools, colleges and professional teams participate in a testing program that incorporates baseline testing of athletes.
3. Once symptom-free, the athlete should be reassessed to establish that cognition and postural stability have returned to normal for that player.
4. An athlete with a concussion should be referred to a physician on the day of injury if he or she lost consciousness or experienced amnesia lasting longer than 15 minutes.

5. A team approach should be used in making return to participation decisions after concussion. This approach should involve input from the athletic trainer, physician, athlete and any referral sources.

6. Athletes who are symptomatic at rest and after exertion for at least 20 minutes should be disqualified from returning to participation on the day of the injury.

7. Athletes who experience loss of consciousness or amnesia should be disqualified from participating on the day of the injury.

8. Because damage to the maturing brain of a young athlete can be catastrophic, younger athletes (under age 18) should be managed more conservatively, using stricter return to participation guidelines than those used to manage concussion in the more mature athlete. Youth athletes are strongly encouraged to never return to play on the same day that a concussion is sustained.

9. Any athlete with a concussion should be instructed to rest, but complete bed rest is not recommended.

10. Because of an increased risk for future concussions, as well as for slowed recovery, athletes with a history of three concussions should be advised that terminating participation in contact sports may be in their best interest.

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