Guest editorial

Keep monitoring young QB after blow to the head

The quarterback is sacked and his head is slammed to the turf.

His coach pulls him aside, and the team trainer asks him a series of questions. The quarterback can answer them, and he says he feels fine.

The coach sends him back out, end of story.

He’s fine, right?

Wrong.

Assessing head injuries in sports has become more involved, and physicians recommend watching impacted players more closely to prevent long-term damage. However, evaluations for injured players are not one-size-fits-all.

“There’s no cookbook. As physicians, we would all love a cookbook. So you have x, y, and z and the athletes should be evaluated for a week, and if you have x, y, and z they should be out for a month. But there’s no cookbook,” said Margot Putukian, director of athletic medicine at Princeton University.

It is important to monitor impacts to the head, because repeated concussions can lead to serious problems.

A child with an underlying disability could perform worse in school after multiple hits to the head, according to Matthew Grady, a pediatrician who specializes in sports medicine at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia.

And it gets worse.

“The concern is that there are injuries such as second impact syndrome,” Putukian said. “You can’t have significant degeneration in terms of blood flow to the brain that can’t be undone.”

The term concussion is used to define concussions as loss of consciousness. Today, physicians classify any impact that shakes the brain as a concussion, and only 10 percent of those cause people to pass out. Further, physicians now know that symptoms of concussions can be delayed.

“The symptoms of concussion are not an all-or-nothing phenomenon. They develop over hours,” said Putukian.

And it gets worse.

“People are willing to take significant risks so that they can continue to play,” said Jack Jull, a neurological surgeon wrote a textbook on brain injuries. According to Jull, brain injuries are far more common among lower socioeconomic groups. In his experience treating head injuries, Jull has observed that athletic training comprises many players’ only dream for the future.

Their dreams need not be dashed—or their brains, for that matter.

“The best prevention for a head injury is not to have one,” Jull said. “But to protect these children or these athletes, you have to hit the first place as if they get hit, to minimize the impact on the brain.”

According to Putukian, athletic teams at the college and high school level have taken measures—such as baseline testing, on-field injury protocols—to prevent and screen for concussions. However, not all athletes are protected as well as they could be.

“Back in high school level, all bets are off,” said Jull.

It’s up to school coaches to educate themselves on head injuries and to make conservative judgments regarding players’ health.

“If you have any doubt about a kid’s ability to get back in the game, hold them out,” said Jull.

To review how you can prevent and check for concussions, download the “Heads Up” toolkit at http://www.cdc.gov/concussion.

Chesn Toledo is a University of Georgia graduate student studying Health and Medical Journalism, which is the only professional graduate program offered through the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication. As a first-year student, she has been assigned Elbert County to research local public health-related issues in rural areas.

Your view

‘Loved Boxed Up’ still needing assistance

‘Loved Boxed Up’ is still collecting monetary donations at Badrock in Elberton.

We still have a lot of items left over from our Christmas collections, so any monetary donations collected are very much appreciated due to shipping costs.

Thank you on behalf of the soldiers overseas!

Thanks Candice Armsturgay