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## **New sports concussion program at Presbyterian Hospital of Dallas Aims to reduce serious head injuries among Dallas-area athletes**

DALLAS, TEXAS (Aug. 29, 2008) – Almost half of high school football players suffer a concussion each season, and more troubling, 35 percent of players say they had more than one in the same season, raising their risk for long-term brain damage, according to sports medicine experts at Presbyterian Hospital of Dallas.

To prevent the potential long-term neurological damage caused by concussions and repeated head injuries, Presbyterian Hospital of Dallas has started a new Concussion Management Program. The program, which features the on-line ImPACT™ baseline test, aims to help local physicians and athletic trainers determine if a player who has suffered a concussion is safe to return to competition.

“Most concussions at the high school level go unreported because the athletes don’t think they’re injured. Sometimes they report ‘it’s only a bell ringer,’ ” said Ken Locker, a certified athletic trainer at Presbyterian Hospital of Dallas and director of Presbyterian Sports Network. “The IMPACT baseline and follow up tests provide objective information to let athletes and athletic trainers know when it’s safe to get back in the game. In the past, many times clinicians were really making a judgment call to estimate return-to-play protocol.”

Following a blow to the head, athletes can experience symptoms like “seeing stars,” “having their bell rung,” or appearing “foggy.” All these can be signs of a concussion, which are common in contact sports like football. Athletes who participate in basketball, baseball, softball and soccer also can suffer concussions.

“The signs of concussion are not always well recognized. Because of that, athletes — and their coaches and parents — may not realize they’re at risk for another injury that could be much worse than the first,” said Dr. Jim Sterling, a physical medicine physician on the medical staff at Presbyterian Hospital of Dallas. “Many times players will return to the field before they should, thinking nothing is wrong.”

The Concussion Management Program at Presbyterian Hospital of Dallas includes a computerized screening test that establishes an athlete’s baseline neurocognitive function. After a

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concussion, an athlete takes the test again, allowing the computer system to calculate if there's been a change to his or her cognitive efficiency. Called the ImPACT™ test, it's considered the state-of-the-art concussion identification/management tool, Locker said.

Dr. Douglas Turgeon, an orthopedic surgeon on the medical staff at Presbyterian Hospital of Dallas and team physician for the Boy's Classic Soccer league in Dallas, attests to the importance of baseline testing. "The 2004 international summit on concussions in Prague, Austria concluded that neurocognitive testing for concussion is one of the four key elements in treating concussion," he said. "Football is not the only sport that has sports concussions; soccer is high on the list as well."

The on-line testing program is used by the majority of teams in the NFL, NBA, MLB, NHL, as well as college sport programs and more than 10,000 school districts across the nation.

Although many people think of a concussion as someone passing out, a person can have a concussion and never lose consciousness, said Dr. Jerry Marlin, a neurosurgeon on the medical staff at Presbyterian Hospital of Dallas.

"It's important to understand that a concussion is actually a mild traumatic brain injury," Dr. Marlin said. "That's why this program is so important. Many people don't realize that even what they think of as a minor concussion is a mild traumatic brain injury."

A concussion can make an athlete vulnerable to a lethal second-impact, if the brain hasn't properly healed. The second concussion — even if it's with less force or impact than the initial head injury — can lead to brain swelling and cause long-term disabilities. In extreme cases, a second injury can be fatal, Dr. Marlin said.

More common are the negative cumulative effects of multiple concussions over time. "It's the minor, repetitive concussions that can have serious, long-term effects on teenagers, socially and academically," Dr. Marlin said. "Parents may have no explanation why their teenager isn't making the grades he or she used to and why their child's personality has changed. To the parents there's seemingly no explanation, or they might think their child is just going through a 'phase.' But a slip in grades and other brain functions could be the result of repetitive concussions."

Athletes can sign up to take the test by login on at [www.phscare.org/concussion](http://www.phscare.org/concussion) or calling Presbyterian Sport Network at 214-345-5010.

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### Symptoms of concussion

The signs and symptoms of a concussion can be subtle and may not appear immediately. Symptoms can last for days, weeks or longer. The two most common concussion symptoms are confusion and amnesia. The amnesia, which may or may not be preceded by a loss of consciousness, almost always involves the loss of memory of the impact that caused the concussion.

**Other immediate signs and symptoms of a concussion may include:**

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Ringing in the ears
- Nausea or vomiting
- Slurred speech

**Some symptoms of concussions don't appear until hours or days later. They include:**

- Mood and cognitive disturbances
- Sensitivity to light and noise
- Sleep disturbances

#### **About Presbyterian Hospital of Dallas**

Established in 1966, PHD is the flagship hospital of Presbyterian Healthcare System, a member of the faith-based, nonprofit Texas Health Resources system. *US News and World Report* ranks PHD, a recognized clinical program leader, providing technologically advanced care to patients, among the nation's best hospitals in digestive disorders, orthopedics, and neurology and neurosurgery. The 866-bed facility has approximately 4,000 employees and an active medical staff of more than 1,000 physicians. For more information about PHD, visit [www.PHSCare.org](http://www.PHSCare.org).

#### **About Texas Health Resources**

Texas Health Resources is one of the largest faith-based, nonprofit health care delivery systems in the United States and the largest in North Texas in terms of patients served. Tar's system of 13 hospitals includes Harris Methodist Hospitals, Arlington Memorial Hospital and Presbyterian Healthcare System, and a medical research organization. THR is a corporate member or partner in six additional hospitals and surgery centers. For more information about Texas Health Resources, visit [www.texashealth.org](http://www.texashealth.org).

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