

When Ethics and Youth Sports Collide

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Disclosure

- Neither myself nor any family member have financial relationships with topics discussed in this presentation



Objectives

1. Discuss the ethical dilemmas arising in youth sports participation
2. Highlight the unique conflicts of interest which arise in sports medicine
3. Provide a framework for maintaining our professionalism when working in youth sports



Why talk about Ethics in Sports Medicine?

- Ethics at its simplest is the study of what makes a particular action in a particular circumstance the right thing to do
- There may be no “right answer” in many situations
- There is no universally accepted code of ethics, but we should engage in conversations to help provide the best care and create a framework for making ethical decisions
- There has long been an adversarial relationship between sporting performance and patient welfare dating back to early Greek and Roman civilization



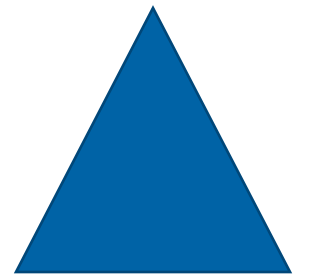
Federation of International Sports Medicine

- FIMS simplified an ethical code into 3 basic principles
 1. Always make the athlete a priority
 2. Never do harm
 3. Never impose your authority in a way that impinges on the individual right of the athlete to make his/her own decision



What about Youth Sports Medicine?

- Sports medicine is a very, unique environment even without the added variable of minors (<18 yo)
- Rather than having a healthcare provider and patient relationship, we have at a minimum the triad of team-athlete-provider
- In youth sports, we typically introduce a 4th member to this equation...



Areas of Concern We are going to cover

- Conflicts of Interest
- Confidentiality
- Autonomy
- Informed Consent
- Return-to-play decisions
- Advertising/Financial
- Youth Sports Industry



Conflicts of Interest

- Excessive ties to the success of a team sets up a conflict of interest
- When we become a “fan,” others may begin to question the clinical decisions being made
- Separate ourselves from being “on the team” and consider ourselves as “covering the team”
- Avoid the “fan syndrome!”



Avoiding Conflicts of Interest on the Sideline

1. Meet with your team, parents, and administrators during the preseason to discuss how you see your role
2. Have players and families read and sign a document describing how certain medical information may be shared with the team
3. Introduce yourself to the opposing team, athletic trainers, coaches, and referees prior to the game while explaining your role
4. Limit excessive emotional or personal relationships with the team that may impair your ability to function as an impartial medical professional



Confidentiality

- Confidentiality is a critical element in healthcare
- Sports medicine providers are often contracted with the “team” rather than the individual and expected to share certain information
- HIPAA/FERPA
- The sidelines is often viewed by hundreds of spectators



Confidentiality

- Keep information confidential as much as possible
- Seek permission from the athlete before disclosing any relevant information
- Substance use, mental health, personal issues?
- Try to provide facilities that safeguard or maximize patient privacy



Autonomy

- Autonomy is the capacity of a rational individual to make an informed, uncoerced decision
- Fundamental principle in ethics but it's complicated in a minor at risk for coercion (parents/team)
- Dependent upon informed consent
- Office setting vs. Sideline setting
- You can respect autonomy of the athlete and family, but this does not mean you have to facilitate anything they want to do
- By playing on a team, player gives up some autonomy...
Player autonomously chooses to become a team member be subject to sports medicine personnel



Informed Consent

- Informed consent requires understanding the potential risks and benefits of a course of action
- Athlete must be competent in decision-making (? Injured ? Adolescent)
- Consent must be voluntary
- Particularly complicated during a game or on the sideline...
- Requires disclosure, capacity/competency, voluntariness
- Documentation is essential



Return-to-Play Decisions

- One of the main ethical conflicts in sports medicine
- Athlete/coach's goal is often to play as soon as possible
- Sports medicine may be the only one focused on both short- and long-term health
- Should be based on the risks to athlete and not dominated by desire to win
- Surveys reveal over half of team physicians report this as major area of conflict
- Awareness of this conflict is the first step!



Advertising & Financial Conflicts

- Teams and schools have recently gone to allowing hospitals and medical groups to bid for the “privilege” of being the team physician
- Has become the norm rather than the exception
- Assure providers are competent
- Full disclosure of arrangement



Cases for Discussion

Analgesics

Concussion

Genetic Testing

COVID

Sports Supplements & Food Marketing



Youth Sports Industry

Take Away Points

- Youth athletes need us to discuss the complex issues around ethics in sports medicine and the sports industry
- Maintain a passion for the sport and a passion for player's well-being
- Avoid conflicts of interest & maintain a high degree of professionalism
- Confidentiality is essential for trust
- Informed consent is tricky in the game environment
- Never abdicate your responsibility to the individual player

Adapted from Devitt BM, McCarthy C. Ethical dilemmas and the sports team doctor. *Br J Sports Med* 2010;44(3):177.





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