

There's no 'I' in today's sports medicine teams

Today's athletes, at all levels, enjoy tremendous advances in sports medicine. Emphasis on prevention, maintenance and performance are a few examples.

What was once strictly the orthopedic surgeon's position as team physician and sports medicine specialist has expanded greatly. The new sports medicine "team" involves doctors in many specialties along with trainers and therapists in their particular areas.

Not that long ago, it was thought that sports medicine was usually surgery.

In reality, only about five percent of sports medicine are surgical problems. The rest are everything else from overuse injuries, sprains and strains, training methods, strength and conditioning programs, therapy, nutrition preventative screenings, etc.

Athletic trainers have become invaluable not only for on-the-field, on-court injury evaluation, but also for their role as rehabilitation specialists. They work closely with all of the various doctors involved with the new sports medicine. Sports specialists in podiatry, chiropractic, physical medicine, pediatrics, osteopathic and orthopedics all can be part of this new approach. Add massage therapists, acupuncture and kinesiologists to the group along with dental, eye care and vision training and sports psychology.

My area, sports podiatry, involves not only foot problems and foot injuries, but also the important connection between foot function and its affect on the rest of the body.

Attention to nutrition and its importance in athletic performance has both changed and grown a lot. What the athlete eats, how often and the whole area of supplements are examples. The importance of water, sports drinks, fuel for the body as well as performance-enhancing diets all are on the athletes' agenda. The importance of mind - sports psychology, mental training has become huge. It's another valuable addition to the "new sports medicine."

Wow, have things changed. As participants - walkers, joggers, bikers, as well as parents of many of our younger athletes, it's great to know about these positive things going on.

After all, the goal of sports medicine has always been treat injuries, prevent injuries, and if needed or wanted - enhance performance.

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