New Study Sheds Light on Collegiate Football Officials and Injury Time Outs for Medical Evaluation of Concussions

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Dallas – The Journal of Athletic Training has just published online a new study, “Calling Injury Timeouts for the Medical Evaluation of Concussion: Determinants of Collegiate Football Officials’ Behavior”: The journal is NATA’s scientific publication.

“Concussion education for officials is important,” says lead author Emily Kroshus, ScD, MPH, assistant professor, University of Washington, Department of Pediatrics. “When officials are more aware of concussion symptoms, they are more confident in calling injury timeouts. Understanding the determinants of whether officials call an injury timeout when they suspect a concussion has important implications for the design of interventions that better support officials in this role.”

Authors assessed the knowledge of U.S. collegiate football officials about concussion symptoms and determined the associations between knowledge, perceived injunctive norms (what others would want them to do) and behavioral self-efficacy (confidence in their ability to call injury timeouts for suspected concussions in athletes during challenging game-day conditions).

The cross-sectional study was completed through an electronic survey during the 2015 college football season. A total of 3,074 U.S. collegiate football officials were contacted: 1,324 participated (a 43 percent response rate).

Officials reported calling approximately one injury timeout for a suspected concussion every four games during the 2015 season. Those officials with more concussion-symptom knowledge had greater behavioral self-efficacy.

Some of the gap between concussions sustained and injury timeouts called may be due to concussion symptoms presenting after the individual left the field of play; the individual choosing to self-report symptoms; or symptoms identified by team medical personnel during normal transitions off the field.

“One way that officials can help ensure sports safety is to recognize potentially concussed athletes and call injury timeouts appropriately so that athletic trainers or other medical personnel can conduct evaluations,” says John Parsons, PhD, ATC, managing director, NCAA Sports Science Institute and a study author. “While all college teams have athletic trainers on staff, only 70 percent of high schools have access to an AT in any capacity and this individual is not necessarily present for all games.”

“When officials believe that coaches, athletic trainers, parents, fans, athletes and athletic administrators are equally committed to safety first, they are more likely to call injury timeouts if they suspect a concussion has occurred, adds Kroshus. “The study also sheds light on the pressure these officials experience on the field and the importance of making them part of a collaborative team committed to sports safety.”