

Initiative to emphasize concussions are treatable

October 23 2014, by Chuck Finder

At a time when the national concussion conversation instills fear and uncertainty among parents and athletes at all levels, the UPMC Sports Medicine Concussion Program is working to change the current discussion where two powerful messages are lost: Concussions can be treated, and there are evidence-based therapies that result in full recoveries every day.

In striving to shift the national discussion to one based in fact and research, UPMC and the Concussion Program are unveiling the online destination ReThinkConcussions.com as part of an initiative to raise awareness about scientifically proven treatments currently available. The Concussion Program, the first in the world when it opened its doors in 2000, treats more sports-related concussions than any other program nationally with 17,000 patient visits per year. UPMC's program consistently contributes to innovations in the field with nearly 20 published, peer-reviewed research studies annually.

"An important reality is this: Concussion is treatable if managed properly," said Michael "Micky" Collins, Ph.D., clinical and executive director of the UPMC Sports Medicine Concussion Program. "With all the new research we've done and the nearly 200 papers we've helped to publish in the past decade or so, we now are able to provide proven treatments and evidence-based rehabilitation therapies. That should be the conversation now instead of the near-hysteria."

"People should think of concussions as a treatable injury in the right

hands, not some untreatable condition that causes you to retreat to a dark room. The individualized approach to this injury, the ability to use a multidisciplinary team to return patients to normal lives, has changed the course of the injury here – and our successes could be repeated across the world, too," added Dr. Collins.

RethinkConcussions.com offers an interactive guide to understanding concussions and how UPMC approaches this complex but unseen injury. The website features information on [concussion](#) therapies and prevalent myths. It explains UPMC's multidisciplinary approach to treating six different types of concussions – each carrying its own symptoms and outcomes. Additionally, the site provides insight into patients' treatment experiences and emotional journeys through some of their stories.

As part of this important initiative, professional athletes and former UPMC patients such as NASCAR great Dale Earnhardt Jr. and Major League catcher David Ross tell their powerful tales in separate videos that will air on television regionally (Ross) and nationally (Earnhardt Jr.), in addition to being found at the new website. Each participated in the spots without compensation, wanting to help spread awareness and education about concussions and their successful rehabilitations.

"We went through activities with results that made sense," Earnhardt says in his video. He visited the clinic and consulted with Dr. Collins regularly following multiple crashes in fall 2012, keeping him out of consecutive races for the first time in his career. "The best decision I made was to go to UPMC."

Ross similarly turned to Dr. Collins following two injuries that removed him from behind the plate in 2013. He credits UPMC and its experts with developing an individualized program that allowed him to return to starting at catcher in time for a dramatic post-season run to a championship. As Ross says, "Without UPMC, I would not be a baseball

player anymore. They saved my career."

Other pro athletes who are or will be featured in the ReThinkConcussions.com initiative include former NFL quarterback Brady Quinn, Major League second baseman Brian Roberts and Tyler Hansbrough of the NBA, among others. Athletes of all ages and levels of play – from recreational to amateur to high school and beyond – also will participate in the effort, demonstrating how concussions strike every sport and walk of life.

Dr. Collins and the UPMC Concussion Program have been at the forefront of the national concussion community for years. He is a co-developer of the ImPACT neurocognitive test, a co-author of the Centers for Disease Control's "Concussion Tool Kit for Physicians," a consultant to a variety of professional and collegiate leagues, and a frequent presenter nationally and internationally helping to train thousands of health care professionals in concussion management and evaluation.

Dr. Collins leads a team of more than 30 clinicians and researchers, comprised of neuropsychologists, primary care [sports medicine](#) physicians, physiatrists, otoneurologists, physical therapists, neurosurgeons, neuroradiologists and orthopaedic surgeons, all devoted to concussion evaluation, treatment and rehabilitation.

"Concussion isn't something you can detect on a CT scan or an MRI, or with a standard neurologic examination. To 'see' this injury you have to know what questions to ask, and our research has shown us this," Dr. Collins said. "By asking the right questions and looking at the right systems in the right way with the right tools, we can put together a very coherent approach to understanding the injury and determining active treatment strategies. That's the important message for people to know now."

Provided by University of Pittsburgh

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