

Speech language pathologists and athletic trainers work together to get athletes enough air

August 5 2015, by Megan Christopher

When an athlete tries to breathe deep and struggles to get air, their performance suffers and stress takes over. Such a common symptom is easily misdiagnosed, but could signal a physical issue that many sports health care professionals may be unaware of. Luckily, an unlikely pair of medical professionals at Ithaca College are teaming up to help athletes recover from this troublesome condition.

Vocal Cord Dysfunction-Exercise Induced Laryngeal Obstruction (VCD-EILO) is an elusive and debilitating condition. A paper by two IC professors illustrates the key features of VCD-EILO and describes how [speech-language pathologists](#) and [athletic trainers](#) can work together to improve symptoms and increase performance in athletes with VCD-EILO.

Mary Pitti, clinical assistant professor in the Department of Speech Language and Audiology, and Michael Matheny, clinical associate professor in the Department of Exercise and Sport Sciences, worked together to address the knowledge void in recognizing the distinct key features of VCD-EILO, the best processes for physician referral, and treatment plans..

Understanding VCD-EILO

VCD-EILO affects the normal breathing cycle during intense exercise.

When an athlete inhales, breathing is interrupted by the closing of the vocal cords, resulting in increased stress, anxiety and negative effects on performance.

Diagnosing VCD-EILO can be challenging due to its ambiguous and common symptoms. Understanding the key features of VCD-EILO can help practitioners distinguish it from other similar conditions including exercise induced asthma—the most common misdiagnosis.

Proper treatment

When a diagnosis is reached, Pitti recommends the patient be referred to a speech-language pathologist for therapeutic intervention. Therapy includes laryngeal relaxation exercises, diaphragmatic breathing and respiratory control techniques to decrease the number and intensity of episodes and possibly eliminate symptoms.

Working together

When collegiate athletic trainers are educated about the symptoms of VCD-EILO, they are able facilitate referral of athletes to speech-language pathologists for treatment. Speech-language pathologists can then provide treatment strategies and recovery techniques to increase athletic performance and reduce symptoms of VDC-EILO.

Together, speech-language pathologists and athletic trainers can monitor precipitators of VCD-EILO episodes to prevent occurrences, manage symptoms, and reduce recovery time.

Provided by Ithaca College

Citation: Speech language pathologists and athletic trainers work together to get athletes enough air (2015, August 5) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-08-speech-language-pathologists-athletic-trainers.html>

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