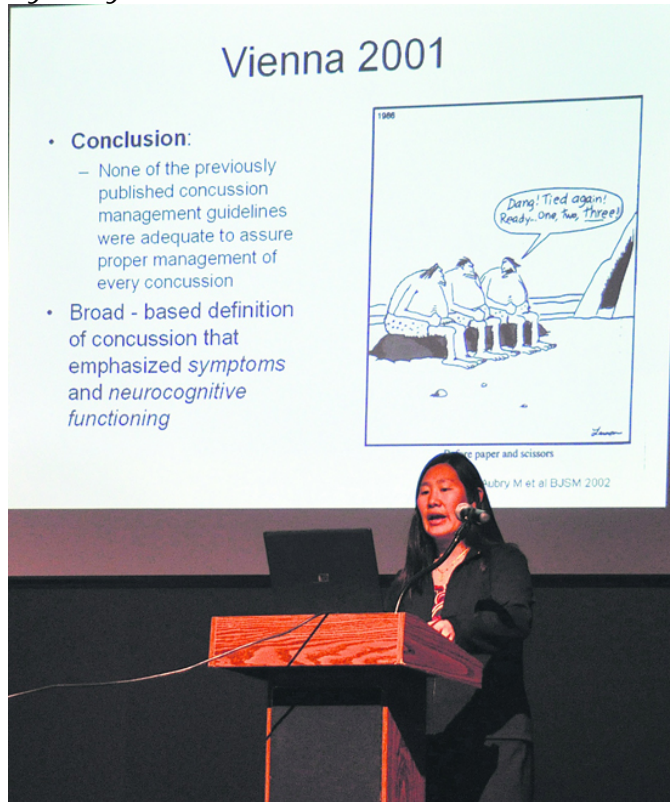


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Overuse Injuries, Concussions in Sports Addressed At Lecture

By Lucy Amaral



Cindy Chang, M.D. Photo Andy Scheck

With so many local Lamorinda kids participating in intensive sports, injuries can often result and parents must recognize this possibility. Knowing the signs of injuries and taking appropriate action was the theme of a lecture given by Cindy Chang, M.D., a sports-medicine specialist at UC Berkeley.

The talk, held at Miramonte on January 27, focused on signs and treatment of overuse injuries and concussions. Chang first acknowledged that along with the positive health benefits of youth athletics, children who play sports regularly when young do tend to grow into athletic, active adults. However, with the growing intensity of today's athletic opportunities, combined with the pressure to excel, overuse injuries in children are increasing.

"At the elite level, the hours they train are incredible," said Chang. "Soccer, for example, can be a year round sport...Fall Club, High School, Olympic Development Program in the summer. It never ends."

Intensive training, specializing in one sport, and little or no down time often leads to overuse injuries, Chang said. Severs disease, lumbar disc injuries, patellar tendinitis, are some of the outcomes from overuse. Chang recommends that parents take an active part to prevent injuries and create a balance, whether it's a variety of sports to work different muscle groups, or taking a break altogether.

"The kids are going to want to play all the time," said Chang. "There must be a balance. Sports are important, activity is important, being part of a team can be important, but not at the sacrifice of your body."

Some sports organizations have begun to take action against overuse injuries. For example, Little League has limited the number of pitches thrown by one pitcher per day to reduce possible shoulder injuries.

During the lecture, Chang emphasized that concussions have a wide variety of subtle signs with which parents need to familiarize themselves. "Concussions do not always include loss of consciousness," said Chang. Additional signs can include: headache, blurred vision, fogginess, poor balance, even inappropriate emotions, are just a few of the signs that can indicate a concussion.

Chang's main message regarding even the suspicion of a concussion is: "When in doubt, sit them out..." for the rest of the game.

The hard part, she added, is getting the kids to tell you something is wrong. "Self-reporting is limited at best, but it's important to have kids know what the symptoms are and why it's important," said Chang, "They don't want to be taken out of the game. They don't want to be seen as weak. They feel they need to tough it out." Which could lead to more extensive damage, she said.

Once a concussion is recognized, she said, return to the game will be slower than the player wants. It can take anywhere from a week to more than a month, said Chang. She recommends parents to visit www.CDC.gov for information on concussion symptoms and recovery options.

Chang concluded: "Be your child's advocate...keep a dialogue going with the coaches. Teach your child the importance of taking care of themselves. And, most important, make sure they know there is life after that sport."

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