JOHN DOHERTY: Skin topical at annual NATA meeting

By John Doherty Sports Medicine | Posted: Tuesday, June 29, 2010 12:00 am |

PHILADELPHIA | Concussions, fractures, heat illness and sprains and strains.

They are the diagnoses one associates with the care provided by an athletic trainer. Last week, here, the National Athletic Trainers' Association held its 61st annual meeting and the prevention and treatment of such misfortunes were covered in detail.

However, at the news conference associated with the meeting, the NATA issued a position statement on a set of conditions with which athletic trainers -- and many members of the general public -- are less comfortable.

Still, because athletic trainers are often the only health care providers with which high school and college athletes have regular contact, they are expected to be experts on skin infections, also.

And with good reason -- according to the position statement, more than half of all infectious diseases in competitive sports over the last eight decades have occurred on the skin. Not the respiratory system or gastro-intestinal tract.

The infection that has generated the most interest over the last 10 years has been MRSA (Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus). Consequently, one of the invited speakers was Drexel University wrestler Kyle Frey, who was hospitalized in January with MRSA in his upper arm. What started as a small pimple ultimately required emergency surgery. Fortunately, no muscle tissue was damaged and Frey was eventually able to finish the season.

"I saw posters around the locker room. I never paid attention to them," he admitted.

Since falling ill, though, he's learned that lesson -- and more.

"I now know how important it is to communicate with my athletic trainer and coach," said Frey.

Because MRSA is so resistant to common antibiotics, it is imperative that the first line of defense against it -- and other skin infections -- be prevention. A prevention program, according to the statement, must include education sessions for athletes and staff at each school or club.

The statement emphasizes good hygiene, saying in part, "Soiled clothing, including practice gear, undergarments, outerwear and uniforms, must be laundered on a daily basis."

However, one speaker added another piece of advice that is not specifically mentioned in the statement. Mike Moyer, executive director of the National Wrestling Coaches Association,

recommended athletes bring those dirty clothes home in a mesh bag, which should go right into the wash, too.

To see the entire position statement, go to www.nata.org/statements/postion-statements.

The full color page, which illustrates various skin infections, should be printed and posted in every locker room.

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