From concussions to ethics: Pediatricians tackle hot-button issues in youth sports

SAN DIEGO – Playing sports isn’t always fun and games for today’s youths who increasingly face injuries and pressure to perform. Fortunately, they have pediatricians in their corner to help ensure they stay safe and reap the physical, emotional and social benefits that sports can provide.

Pediatricians will tackle some of the hottest topics in youth sports during a symposium to be held prior to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) National Conference & Exhibition in San Diego. Titled “1, 2, 3, Go! Sports in the World of Pediatrics — Playing it Safe and Making it Fun!” the Peds21 symposium will be held from 12:35 to 5 p.m. PDT Oct. 10 in Ballroom 6 CDEF of the San Diego Convention Center.

The keynote speakers will include Zackery Lystedt, who sustained multiple concussions during a junior high football game in 2006; his parents, Victor and Mercedes; and his physician, Stanley A. Herring, MD. Zack underwent emergency surgery, experienced numerous strokes, and has spent the last eight years learning to walk, talk and eat again.

The Lystedts and Dr. Herring not only have been committed to Zack’s recovery, they also were instrumental in the passage of the nation’s first “concussion law.” The Washington State legislation known as the Lystedt Law protects young athletes with symptoms of concussion from returning to the game too early. The legislation has served as the impetus for concussion laws in every state and the District of Columbia.

“Not only do we know the law was effective, but we are also aware of how much of an impact it has made throughout the nation,” Victor Lystedt said. “The amount of talk on concussion and concussion management came from our law and Zack’s image. He has been able to change the culture of the way football is being played today.”

The symposium also will include a presentation on sports participation by youths with chronic conditions such as arthritis, cystic fibrosis and obesity by Claire LeBlanc MD, FAAP, FRCP, head of rheumatology at Montreal Children’s Hospital in Quebec, Canada.

Paul Stricker, MD, FAAP, a youth sports medicine specialist at Scripps Clinic in San Diego, will talk about the ethics of pushing kids too hard.

“We are living in a dangerous world with increasing child sacrifice in youth sports,” Dr. Stricker said. “As parents and as physicians, we have that ethical responsibility of regardless of what’s going on around us, the child’s health is top priority. If they have to get pulled from a sport, if they have to miss a tournament, that’s just the way it has to be.”

Other topics to be addressed during the symposium include the importance and limitations of sports physicals and the pros and cons of cardiac screening.
The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 62,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety and well-being of infants, children, adolescents and young adults. For more information, visit www.aap.org.