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Contact: Jaclyn Norberg 973-552-8765

ATHLETIC TRAINERS NECESSARY TO ENSURE STUDENT ATHLETE HEALTH AND SAFETY, SAY EXPERTS

Panel Supports Sarlo's Legislation

MARCH 1, 2010 – Athletic trainers play a crucial role in ensuring the safety and health of student athletes, a panel of experts stressed today at the Athletic Trainers' Society of New Jersey (ATSNJ) 24th Annual Athletic Training Conference in Plainsboro. Sports are an excellent opportunity for student-athletes to be active and healthy, but experts say it is important that measures are in place to ensure they are participating under the safest possible conditions.

Senator Paul A. Sarlo (D-Bergen/Passaic/Essex), recently introduced legislation (S-693) that would require each school district that conducts an interscholastic athletic program employ one or more school athletic trainers. "School sports give our kids an opportunity to be active, healthy, and learn the fundamentals of the game, but proper precautions must be in place to make sure these activities are safe," says Sarlo, who is also a volunteer coach in his spare time. "This bill is about keeping our student athletes safe and out of harm's way."

Sarlo became interested in the issue after hearing about a case in Kentucky where a high school football player collapsed and died as a result of complications from heat stroke after an intense practice. The football coach, who did not have the benefit of an athletic trainer on staff, was charged with criminally negligent homicide and later acquitted. "The case in Kentucky definitely illustrates the problem with the lack of athletic trainers on site during team practices. Having an athletic trainer on-hand reduces the risk, and ensures that injured or ill players have access to immediate medical care if they should need it," Sarlo says.

Dr. Robb Rehberg, a professor at William Paterson University and ATSNJ Past-President, expressed the ATSNJ's support for the Senator's legislation. "The best way to protect a student athlete's health is by employing the services of an athletic trainer. As health care providers with expertise in the prevention, recognition, and care of athletic injury and illness, athletic trainers play a key role in keeping our student athletes healthy and safe," said Rehberg, who is also a recent appointee to the New Jersey Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. "Athletic trainers serve as a resource for coaches, parents, and athletes, and have specific training in making return to play decisions and coordinating proper care. In the absence of a physician, athletic trainers are the most qualified personnel in this area, which is why it is important that all schools with athletic programs employ one."

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The panel included several experts, including Dr. Kevin M. Guskiewicz, a leading researcher on concussions from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Thomas Bottiglieri, D.O. a team physician for several Bergen County High Schools, and Charles Gatt, MD. a prominent New Jersey orthopedic surgeon. “Athletic Trainers bridge the gap between coaches and parents in the athletic health care system. They are the eyes and ears of physicians on the sidelines and in the athletic training rooms.” stated Bottiglieri.

“One of the most important things is the athletic trainers know the kids very well. They can help from both a personality stand point and an intellectual stand point, which goes a long way in making some important decisions when it comes to return to play,” said Gatt, who is the Chairman of the Orthopaedic Department of the Medical School, UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson University. In addition to doctor-athletic trainer relationships, Gatt also discussed the value of an athletic trainer when an athlete has chronic injuries. “The athletic trainer is a big help in telling me how athletes are recovering from injuries, and how the initial injuries occur.”

John Bamber the Head Football Coach at Ewing High School in Ewing, NJ, provided a coaches perspective, and discussed how he handles the conflicting emotions about returning an athlete, specifically a talented one, to the game versus leaving them on the bench. Bamber also touched on the pressure parents place on their child to return to play even if the child has an injury.

Niki Popyer, a Marlboro High School girls basketball player, and her mother, Cathy Popyer, illustrated the important role Marlboro’s athletic trainer played in her receiving proper health care. Popyer, who sustained multiple concussions while playing sports, credits the management of her condition by her athletic trainer as what helped most in her return to play. “[My athletic trainer] not only helped me with my physical symptoms, but he also helped me emotionally. When I stopped playing, I was in a bad place and he really helped me through that too.” “I cannot imagine kids playing sports without an athletic trainer on-hand” said Cathy Popyer.

Ridgewood student-athlete parent, Glenn Jorgensen also described how his children’s injuries affected him and the importance of receiving prompt treatment from an athletic trainer that covers practices and game. “Having an athletic trainer is something that I feel is necessary for the safety of the kids.”

ABOUT THE ATHLETIC TRAINERS’ SOCIETY OF NEW JERSEY

ATSNJ, Inc. consists of Licensed Athletic Trainers, physicians and other allied health care professionals whose goal is to promote quality healthcare for athletes in any setting. For more information, visit the ATSNJ on the web at www.atsnj.org

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