Effectiveness of Pre-Participation Physical Exams in Screening for Mental Health Disorders in Secondary School Athletes

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Context: Mental and physical health are both crucial components of the athletic trainers’ role in injury prevention and management. These two conditions often impact one another with physical injury having psychological or emotional consequences and psychological problems, including disordered eating and substance abuse, having physical consequences. Like physical injuries, mental health disorders may limit or preclude athletic participation until the condition has been adequately identified and treated. Objective: The objective of this study was to examine the effectiveness of each state high school athletic association’s (SHSAA) recommended or required PPE form for screening for Mental Health Disorders. Several sources, including guidelines from the American Academy of Family Physicians, sports psychology textbooks and the PHQ-9 Health Patient Questionnaire, were utilized to identify seven recommended areas for mental health screening in patients. Design: This study used an enumeration design. Setting: The study was conducted in a University research laboratory. Patients or Other Participants: Each SHSAA served as a subject in this study. Interventions: Each SHSAA’s PPE form was utilized to examine effectiveness in screening for Mental Health Disorders based on expert recommendations as identified in the available literature. These forms were accessed from the association’s website or by contacting the organization if the forms were not available via the world-wide web. Main Outcome Measures: This study examined each SHSAA’s recommended or required PPE form for effectiveness in screening for Mental Health Disorders as measured by assessing questions in seven content areas. Each question was scored as either assessed or not assessed and one point was awarded for each question that was assessed. Results: 48 of 50 (96%) of SHSAA utilize a recommended or required PPE form. Of these, 20/48 (42%) utilize the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) PPE form in its entirety, 3/48 (6%) use an abbreviated version of the AAFP PPE form and 25/48 (52%) utilized a form developed by the SHSAA. Mean score was 2.35/7 (range 0-4) and median score was 2/7 for Mental Health Disorder screening effectiveness. 22/48 (46%) state associations scored 4 points for screening, while 12/48 (25%) state associations scored 1 point and another 8/48 (17%) scored 0 points for screening. The most commonly screened areas included depression (48%), stress (56%), disordered eating (83%), and substance abuse (46%). Three areas that failed to be screened by any state association’s PPE form included sleep disturbances, feelings of disappointment for letting others down, and causing physical harm to oneself. Conclusions: SHSAA are not doing an adequate job screening for Mental Health Disorders in athletes during PPE. States utilizing the AAFP PPE form score the highest, assessing four of the recommended seven content areas for Mental Health screening. Word Count: 439