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The team physician in football: What skills are important?

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Abstract

Background: There is no formal training programme for the Team Physician (TP) in football at present. **Aim:** To determine the common medical conditions and injuries encountered by the TP of a national football team. This could assist the aspiring Team Physicians in self-directed learning. **Type of study:** A retrospective descriptive study. **Methods:** The records of 174 medical consultations of players and staff at 2 international football competitions, including preceding training camps, in which a National Football Team participated, were analysed looking at the nature and locations of injuries, the illnesses encountered, the referrals to other medical specialists, and the players presenting to the national team in an injured state. **Results:** 117(67.2%) of consultations were for injuries, 57(32.7%) were for illnesses and counselling sessions. Upper respiratory tract infections and gastrointestinal conditions accounted for 55% of illnesses. Of the injuries, 99 of 102 (97%) player injuries were soft tissue injuries. One (1%) of the player injuries involved a serious head injury. Five players required referrals to other specialists. Twelve (7%) of consultations involved evaluating and treating players presenting to national team training camps with injuries sustained at their clubs. **Conclusion:** The TP in football needs to be versed in: management of soft tissue injuries, emergency medicine and pre-hospital management of traumatic and medical emergencies, and common conditions seen in family medicine. Knowledge of the updated doping control regulations will prevent doping violations. Counselling skills, knowledge of adolescent issues, and basic osteopathic skills are useful. A referral network of medical specialist should be established when travelling.

Keywords: soccer; team doctor; illness; injury; athlete

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