



Mental Health and Wellness in the Athlete: Increasing Awareness and Optimizing Care

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Goals and Objectives

- To become familiar with the scope of support for athlete mental health and wellness.
- To understand the importance of appropriate confidentiality in the care of the athlete.
- To describe the essential role of the primary care physician and team medical staff in organizing delivery of care.

Athlete Mental Health and Wellness

- Clinical conditions such as depression, anxiety, personality disorders, ADHD etc affect large numbers of the US population.
- They are “human” conditions.
- Affect individuals of all ages.
- Athletes are no exception.
- Some mental health conditions – e.g. psychoses- may initially present in younger individuals who are participating in sport.

Athlete Mental Health and Wellness

- The primary care physician and team physician are often in the position to be the first to recognize, diagnose and initiate treatment.
- This may occur in the course of clinical care or when serving as a team physician – even as part of the preparticipation evaluation.
- Early recognition can be facilitated by the long-term relationship that the primary care physician has developed.
- Importantly, this is due to an approachability and trust that the physician has established, providing the athlete with a level of comfort in discussing sensitive issues.

Challenges to Providing Mental Health Care for Athletes

- Providing a supportive environment – seeking care is OK
- Reducing barriers to care
- Timely access and follow up
- Confidentiality

Challenges to Providing Mental Health Care for Athletes

- At the elite and professional levels, these challenges can have significant impact.
- Athletes may fear losing opportunities.
 - Scholarships, NIL contracts and endorsements
 - Draft status, contracts, free agency opportunities, endorsements
- Athletes can view the team medical staff as part of the ownership “side” and thus feel the medical staff is not able to provide confidential care.
- Even the scheduling of appointments, or confirming care is taking place, and appropriate sharing of medical information (e.g. use of pharmacologics) can be viewed as compromising confidentiality.
- What if the athlete is suffering from a mental health condition that requires them to take time off from their sport?

Unique Situations in Athletes

- Injury – separation from team/sport.
- Separation from family or other support due to sport-related travel.
- Transitions – to HS level, to collegiate level, to national or professional level.
- Decision to pursue online schooling to advance sport (e.g. tennis and figure skating)
- Lack of progress in the sport or perceived lack of success
- Adult or other external pressures
- Recognize – the athlete who frequently presents with injuries/pain, esp without identifiable cause, may be depressed and/or looking for a way to step away or discontinue the sport

Overview of NBA/WNBA Mental Health and Wellness Program

- NBA and the Players Association have Complementary Resources for Mental Health
- Mental Health & Wellness: Recommended Practices for NBA & WNBA Teams
- Ongoing Dialogue Between Team Staff and Team-Based Mental-Health Professionals and League Mental-Health Advisors
- Training and Resources for Team and League Staff

NBA/WNBA Mental Health and Wellness

- 2017 CBA – Mental Wellness Program Specified
 - “The NBA and NBPA shall establish a mental wellness program for current players”
- In September 2018, the League’s mental health advisors convened NBA team staff and team mental health personnel for an in person meeting to discuss the program.
- NBA Mind Health established 2018

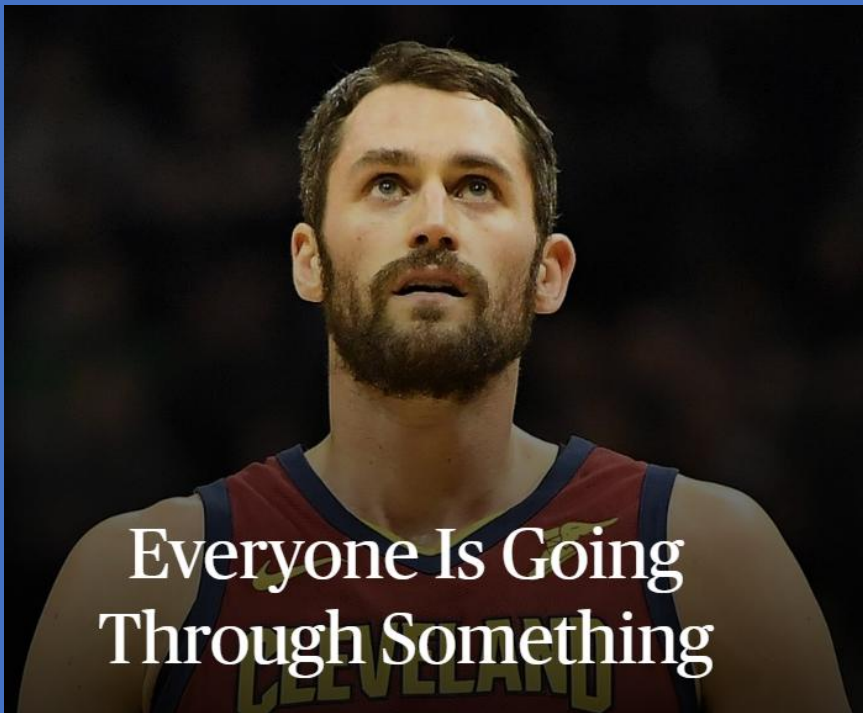


NBA and WNBA Mental Health Initiatives

- Recommended mental health & wellness practices developed for teams spring 2018
- Input gathered from:
 - Mental health experts from outside the NBA (psychiatrists and psychologists)
 - Team physicians, athletic trainers, and performance staff
 - Other mental health providers who work with players
- Each team encouraged to provide annual mental health and wellness educational meetings



Increasing Awareness



**Sports
Illustrated**

Sep 18, 2018

Kevin Love Launches Kevin Love Fund to Inspire Physical, Mental Well-Being

By Charlotte Carroll

NBA/WNBA Mental Health and Wellness

Recommended Practices for Teams

- Retain and make available to players on a voluntary basis mental health professionals with experience in clinical mental health issues.
- Ensure that all mental health professionals with whom a team works are appropriately credentialed, licensed and experienced.
- Enact a written action plan for mental health emergencies.
- Make educational opportunities regarding mental health awareness available to players.

Creating an Environment that Promotes Players' Mental Health and Wellness

- Privacy considered at each step of care
- Process for players to connect with services should be simple/direct and clearly communicated
- Services should be convenient and easily obtained; available in-person where players live and work during the season AND off-season
- Flexible enough to accommodate players' unique schedules and travel
- Services should be sufficiently broad to address acute problems, ongoing or chronic issues, and access to emergency or crisis care needs
- Wherever possible, there should be integration between mental health and wellness clinical services and player education activities

Mental Health Professionals

- Experience in clinical mental health issues
- Teams should identify 1-2 mental health clinicians who are licensed (may be psychologists and/or clinical social workers)
- In addition to 1-2 team mental health clinicians, teams should identify a psychiatrist (M.D. or D.O.)
 - Licensed, board certified
 - Experience working with professional or collegiate athletes
 - Available on a prioritized basis
- Teams should solicit voluntary and anonymous feedback from players and team staff both about the efficacy and accessibility of mental health clinicians

Team Education and Awareness

- Teams should provide educational materials or sessions to promote awareness to players regarding mental health with the following considerations in mind:
 - Teams' education should establish a culture of awareness
 - Significant focus should be placed on how to maintain and promote a healthy mind and body
 - Teams should consider working with league mental health advisors to provide ongoing in-person sessions with frequent refresher programming
 - Resources should be adjusted, enhanced and supplemented based upon player feedback, team mental health clinicians, and management

Individual Counseling Resources

- League and Players Association have complementary networks in order to provide players options to seek care
- The NBA provides counselors available for players, their families and team staff through NBA Player Development
- Available on a confidential basis
- Provide crisis assistance, resources and information for mental health-related services
- Also accessible to speak to players regarding stress, relationships and other wellness-related issues

Resources for Staff who Interact with Players

- Created and distributed to coaches, athletic trainers, and player development staff
- Raising awareness
- Recognizing signs of individuals who may be experiencing mental health challenges
- Creating an environment that fosters mental health and wellness

The Effects of Social Media



"I've tuned out social media because that's a place that can really bring you down if you pay too close attention to what everyone is saying. So I don't."

“Beating Down the Stigma”



“It’s such a rollercoaster ride and you have to find a calm to get through it every single day...

Being a pro is extremely lonely for me. You know, other people might have their own vices that they use to get through it. The hardest and the toughest thing is you making that sacrifice or losing friendships, being more distanced from your family and missing out on special moments. You miss out on the norm of a life in a sense.”

NBA Outreach



NBA Cares @nbacares · Mar 16

Former @WNBA player @chold1 knows what it takes to have a healthy mind and body on and off the court. In celebration of @nba FIT Week, @jedfoundation wants you to have the skills you need too. Visit fit.nba.com to learn more.

#NBAFIT



A photograph of Chamique Holdsclaw, a former WNBA player, speaking into a microphone. She is wearing a black hat and a blue and black plaid shirt. The background is dark with some stage lighting.

JED
jedfoundation.org

"I learned that with the right medication, the proper support, exercise, that I could live a healthy and productive life."

Chamique Holdsclaw
WNBA Legend, JED Storyteller


nba.com/mindhealth

Life After a Playing Career At Any Age or Level



"I'll be in therapy," Wade said. "Seriously. I mean it, it is going to be a big change. I told my wife, I said, 'I need to do therapy, and we need to do a little bit.'"

Summary Points

- The primary care physician has a unique role in identifying mental health conditions in athletes.
- Providing care in a confidential manner is highly important for athletes who may fear being stigmatized and losing future opportunities.
- Harness local resources and create a multidisciplinary team to provide comprehensive ongoing care.
- Develop mental health education/awareness materials for athletes, but also coaches, team staff and parents.
- Establish mechanisms for prompt access to care.
- If you work with a team, have a mental health emergency action plan.
- Review the program yearly with your care team.

