

WORKING THE SIDELINES

Credit: Produced by Victoria Youcha and Brian King, BrainLine

Jay Driscoll

From my perspective as a person who is a first responder, who is likely to be the first person to evaluate a patient with a mild traumatic brain injury, I also deal with issues of education and awareness in my population. Not only with my students, but with their families and sometimes with medical professionals that we will deal with. When we a student that has suffered a mild traumatic brain injury or anything that we suspect to be of that type, we have a very low threshold for referring these people out to people who are more qualified and more equipped to make specific diagnoses and start a really integrated, thorough treatment plan.

This has not always been the case. I have been at St. Albans school for eighteen years and I can tell you at the beginning of the process, you were kind of on your own. There wasn't a lot of research; there wasn't a lot of material to refer to in managing mild traumatic brain injury. I too see first hand the challenges that are presented in integrating a treatment plan with a very challenging academic atmosphere, with a very challenging social atmosphere, with very challenging peer pressure to return to play, to kind of work your way through this injury that doesn't really appear in anyway that anybody can see. If you have a sprained ankle and you're limping around, you have a swollen ankle, people can see you have a swollen ankle; people can see you're not ready to go. Particularly with teenagers and adolescents, they don't really understand that, if they don't see something wrong. So there is a lot of peer pressure going around for kids who've had mild traumatic brain injury to kind of under report their symptoms.

One study that we did years ago in regard to a device used on a football helmet. We did surveys about regarding their—the people using the device as opposed to the people that were not and what we really found at the end when we brought all the surveys in is that there was a huge under reporting by the students of incidents of mild traumatic brain injury. So that is one of the really tough issues that we deal with, is educating everybody and I think one of the things I try to educate my parents and my kids on is defining a term. Defining a term because I'll have a parent come in and say, 'Well he wasn't out cold, he didn't have a concussion.' They got a thousand sets of different criteria that they use pretty randomly that they've heard here, there and everywhere to define what they think is a concussion and the other challenge that we have is sometimes in the medical community we will get somebody who has been evaluated but hasn't been thoroughly, or in my opinion sometimes, properly evaluated and we will get a return to play criteria that is inappropriate. So there is a lot of difficulty in awareness and defining of terms.