



Significant shortcomings in information dissemination and data collection about concussion amongst youth - University of Toronto research indicates

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There are significant gaps in availability and dissemination of knowledge regarding concussion amongst Canadian youth, according to an initial research study by the University of Toronto. Researchers identified a lack of awareness regarding concussion symptoms, treatment procedures, and the threat posed by the injury as some of the primary blind spots for key stakeholders including the youth and their parents.

Over 155,000 Canadians are estimated to have suffered from a concussion in 2014. More recent data from the Canadian Institute for Health Information indicates an increase in this number with an especially alarming rise of concussions amongst Canadian youth while playing sports. But this rise in concussions has not been matched by more information dissemination regarding the injury in the public domain. Researchers found a lack of clear, easily accessible information on concussions that would allow various stakeholders (including the youth, the parents, the teachers and the coaches) to make intelligent decisions to ensure the safety of the youth. This is extremely dangerous since concussion is an invisible injury – it can usually only be diagnosed from its symptoms and not by medical examinations – and can even be fatal if left untreated.

The brief research study, undertaken over the summer by the Behavioural Economics in Action at Rotman (BEAR) research centre following initial conversations with the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) involved an extensive literature review of existing information on concussions in Canada. With a view to identifying best practices and recommendations for health authorities, researchers conducted interviews with relevant stakeholders including teachers and medical professionals across several organisations such as the Toronto Eastern General Hospital and Sunnybrook Research Institute.

Research indicated two primary decision points along the journey of a concussion patient – from being injured to full recovery – where errors were likely and towards which public health interventions can be targeted:

- 1) The first decision pertains to the accurate detection of symptoms
- 2) The second decision pertains to the injury being taken seriously and immediately being reported to a qualified medical professional.

In each case, research indicated that a lack of awareness was leading to incorrect decisions being taken by one or multiple stakeholders. Researchers also noted a significant gap in specific data pertaining to concussion incidence in across Canada, with available data only providing a patched-up image of the impact of this invisible injury on the country.

Amongst recommendations to impact choices at these decision points, the authors propose the creation of a central, informational website where all basic information pertaining to concussion in youth is available along with easy access to other resources. Containing different sections tailored to the needs of different stakeholders, the website aims to improve decision making by providing guidance on all stages of a concussion – from a child being injured till when he/she has made a full recovery.

A draft version of the proposed website is available at: <http://concussioninyouth.wixsite.com/uoft> and a video documenting the research project is available at: <https://youtu.be/3U8QE8zw8mc>

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