

Concussion not something to take for granted



Helmets can help, but they are no guarantee a skier won't sustain a concussion. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

While football players are getting a ton of ink when it comes to concussions, these head injuries aren't limited to those on the gridiron.

Skiers and snowboarders – and not just the professionals – are susceptible to concussions. It could be the result of catching an edge and taking a hard fall, or a trick gone wrong in the terrain park.

Car accidents, falling on ice or any surface, or getting hit in the head – they all can result in a concussion.

The good news is doctors are more aware of the symptoms and are taking the issue more seriously than they used to. The bad news is there is no definitive test to determine if someone

has a concussion.

A panel of medical experts from Barton Health on Sept. 13 spoke before a group of nearly 80 people at Lake Tahoe Community College about how dangerous a concussion is, the symptoms and what can be done to recover fully from one.

Terry Orr, an orthopedic surgeon with Barton who has worked with the U.S. ski and snowboard teams, rattled off several statistics:

- Two-thirds of those with a concussion don't think it's a serious condition
- 41 percent don't want to be taken out of play
- 36 percent don't think they had a concussion.

He said this is why it's necessary for coaches and parents to know the signs and symptoms of concussions.

Neck pain, double vision, severe headaches, weakness or tingling in arms and legs, seizures and being unconscious are some of the symptoms. A person might stagger after the impact, have a blank look or stare, be disoriented or confused.

Depression, seizures and cognitive impairment can be long-term complications.

Players in the National Football League have proven why concussions need to be taken seriously. The Journal of the American Medical Association this summer revealed that of the 111 brains of deceased players it examined 110 had the degenerative brain disease CTE or chronic traumatic encephalopathy.

Those involved need to understand that a concussion without proper care can lead to long-term brain damage. That's why that college scholarship or championship needs to become secondary to the player's health. A concussed player should

never be allowed to return to the field, and instead should be seen by a medical professional.

“We want people to recover,” Jeremy Vandehurst with Barton Health said. “Return to play should be gradual.”

Barton has protocols in place to determine when a player can participate in her sport again. It could take a week, could take longer. It’s up to the individual’s progress.

Primary care doctors are often the ones who first see the concussed patients. There is a list of 22 symptoms they look for. What the initial exam reveals will determine the course of treatment.