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Neurosurgeons Issue Position Statement on Traumatic Brain Injury in Sports at AANS Annual Scientific Meeting in Denver

DENVER – While there has been increased media coverage in the last year related to head injuries incurred in the NFL as well as in collegiate and high school football, there are many sports and recreational activities that cause serious head injury. “There is a huge need to build awareness, because far too many people, including children, are suffering serious and life-altering head injuries and the incidence is increasing,” said American Association of Neurological Surgeons President James T. Rutka, MD, PhD, FRCS. Further, there is a growing body of scientific evidence that indicates that repeated blows to the head incurred in some sports cause grave consequences, including chronic traumatic encephalopathy. There were an estimated 446,788 sports-related head injuries treated at U.S. hospital emergency rooms in 2009. This number represents an increase of nearly 95,000 sports-related injuries from the prior year.

“Neurosurgeons know all too well the potentially devastating consequences of head injuries associated with sports. Neurosurgeons have been leaders in the field of traumatic brain injury (TBI) and have served as team physicians at all levels of athletics,” said Congress of Neurological Surgeons President Christopher C. Getch, MD. In releasing this position statement, the Joint Section on Neurotrauma and Critical Care of the AANS and CNS has acknowledged the seriousness of sports-related head injuries and neurosurgeons’ key role in treatment and prevention.

“We are encouraging all neurosurgeons to take the lead in their communities regarding this important public health issue, by participating in prevention programs, supporting educational and legislative endeavors, and treating patients with sports-related TBI,” said Shelly D. Timmons, MD, PhD, FACS, lead author of the position statement and chair of the Section.

The key issues touched upon in the position statement:

- Widespread recognition of signs and symptoms of concussion and other forms of TBI must be a primary goal of public education. Guidance on appropriate medical intervention, abstention and return-to-play should be integral elements of this education.
- Sports participants should be adequately educated about the risks, safety measures, and protective equipment available to them.
- Public education initiatives should be advocated by communities, professional organizations, educational institutions, and professional athletic associations.
- Guidelines should be readily available and utilized routinely by coaches, trainers, athletes, and parents of minor athletes.
- Ongoing funding of research is essential to furthering the understanding of long-term cognitive and behavioral consequences and to improving mechanisms of prevention and treatment.
- Legislative efforts should be aimed at enforcing utilization of guidelines in organized sports, educating the public, and funding research and education programs.

The Position Statement on Traumatic Brain Injury in Sports is posted at <http://www.neurotraumasection.org/documents/JointSectionStatement.pdf>.

The AANS has in-depth information on sports-related head injury at <http://www.aans.org/PatientInformation.aspx>. Click on Conditions and Treatments and Patient Safety.

The American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS), founded in 1931, and the Congress of Neurological Surgeons (CNS), founded in 1951, are the two largest scientific and educational associations for neurosurgical professionals in the world. These groups represent approximately 8,000 neurosurgeons worldwide. Neurological surgery is the medical specialty concerned with the prevention, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of disorders that affect the entire nervous system, including the spinal column, spinal cord, brain and peripheral nerves. For more information, please visit www.aans.org or www.cns.org. For more information about the Council of State Neurosurgical Societies, visit www.csnsonline.org.