Sports Concussion Clinic Keeps Area Athletes Safe

September is a busy month at Albany Medical Center’s Sports Medicine Concussion Clinic. Back-to-school season and the start of fall sports create an increased need for care. “Our phones really start ringing after Labor Day,” said clinic Director Hamish Kerr, MD, who added that, regardless of the season, public interest in the clinic has spiked.

“Since 2009, we’ve gone from seeing one or two patients a month to 50 or 60,” said Dr. Kerr, who sees patients at Albany Medical Center’s Latham Medicine/Pediatrics Office, where the clinic is based, and at Capital Region Orthopaedics, where he treats patients with musculoskeletal injuries.

The dangers of concussion, a type of traumatic brain injury caused by a bump, blow or jolt to the head, have risen in the national consciousness, too. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that during the last decade emergency room visits for sports- and recreation-related traumatic brain injuries, including concussions, have increased by 60 percent among children and adolescents. The number and rate of these injuries are highest in football and girls’ soccer.

To meet this growing need, Dr. Kerr, a team physician for Siena College, USA Rugby and the United States Olympic Committee, has created a multidisciplinary clinic that is kicking into full force this fall. The clinic offers a multimodal evaluation process that includes a clinical examination, computerized neuropsychological assessment, treadmill exercise testing and balance evaluation in collaboration with Albany Med’s Physical Therapy Department. The clinic’s specialists also provide patients with guidance on returning to work, school or sports after an injury.

Working alongside Dr. Kerr are pediatric neurologist John Pugh, MD, PhD, and Deborah Light, MD, a sports medicine specialist and panel physician for professional boxing and wrestling events for the New York State Athletic Commission.

The clinic treats adult and pediatric patients, and also offers educational services to athletic directors and coaches. “We want everyone—coaches, referees, parents—to know what to look for in athletes who may have sustained concussions,” Dr. Kerr said. “Severe injuries can happen to people even when they don’t lose consciousness.”

A Paperless Path Forward

It’s official. The last paper patient health record on Albany Medical Center’s main campus was coded on August 25.

Over the last year and a half, Albany Med has implemented Soarian Electronic Data Management (EDM) technologies that allow for patient data to exist in digital form. “We now have a single location for online storage of medical records and retrieval by multiple users in real time,” said Mary Hand, vice president of Information Services.

Inpatient and outpatient paper health records on Albany Med’s main campus will now be barcode and scanned into EDM to allow for quick and easy access. “This is a major step toward our transformation to a fully electronic medical record at Albany Medical Center,” Hand said. In 2015, Albany Med’s South Clinical Campus will be migrating to Soarian, as well.

Sherry Labelle, associate director of Health Information Services, said the effect already has been transformative: “Everything involving patient care and service is now so much more efficient, and access is instantaneous. Now, instead of needing to pull records, physicians can log on from anywhere at any time and access records securely.”

Like Labelle, Janis Leonard, director of Health Information Services, has worked in Albany Med’s department of Health Information Services for more than 30 years. She was the person to code the last paper patient record—as luck would have it, on her birthday. “We’ve been waiting for this day for a long time,” Leonard said. “I told everyone in the office it was the best birthday present ever.”

A Big Splash for ALS Research

James Wymer, MD, PhD, got doused by fellow physicians, nurses and staff from Albany Med’s Neurosciences Institute when they took the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge last month to help raise awareness of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). The work these researchers do each day is helping us to better understand this devastating disease and find ways to combat it.
Patient Raises Research Funds for Parkinson’s Disease

Postal carrier Mark Burek can pinpoint the moment that eventually led him to Albany Medical Center and to his mission to help people with Parkinson’s disease.

He was delivering mail on a snowy day seven years ago. “I noticed my right footprint was a long skid mark, much different from my left,” said Burek, a Castleton resident and retired Navy senior chief petty officer.

He ignored it for a few weeks, until his wife picked up on something else. “She said when I was eating I was slow getting food to my mouth,” Burek said, “as if I was afraid I was going to drop something.”

He knew it was time to see an expert. Burek was referred to Eric Molho, MD, director of the Parkinson’s Disease and Movement Disorders Center at Albany Med, the only center of its kind in the region.

Dr. Molho diagnosed Burek with early Parkinson’s disease, a progressive disorder of the nervous system that affects movement.

While the diagnosis left him shaken, he quickly channeled his energies in a positive direction. He launched Parkinson’s Albany, now known as Hope Soars, a foundation that has raised more than $15,000 to benefit the Parkinson’s Research Fund at Albany Med.

He’s active in Pedaling for Parkinson’s, a cycling program developed specifically for those with the disease. And this November, for the second year in a row, he will compete in the New York City Marathon.

“Mark’s drive to help people live with Parkinson’s is inspirational,” Dr. Molho said. “He’s helping us fund research initiatives so we can better understand how to manage and, hopefully, someday defeat this disease.”

“There is no cure for Parkinson’s right now,” Burek said, “but we have hope. We go day-to-day doing the little things, hoping that someday they’ll add up to something big.”

Mother and Daughter Launch New Medical Careers at Albany Med

Christine Kim, MD, ’14, had no trouble adjusting to her first day of residency in Albany Med’s Division of Otolaryngology earlier this summer, nor to her first day of medical school four years before.

“It’s not that difficult when your mom introduces you to everyone on the floor,” she said. Christine’s mother, Grace Kim, MD, started her own residency at Albany Med in 2009, just one year before Christine started medical school here. Dr. Grace Kim is now embarking on a fellowship in endocrinology.

“Since we’re both going through these new experiences together, she gets what I’m going through,” Dr. Christine Kim said. “I always have that support.”

Her mother didn’t fit the traditional medical student mold. A native of South Korea, Dr. Grace Kim was a full-time music professor and part-time church organist when she “felt a calling,” she said. With the support of her husband, a Christian minister, she decided to pursue a career in medicine.

“I knew medicine was a good tool to reach people,” she said. She began her pre-med coursework in 2001, at age 41, when her daughter was in middle school and her younger son was in elementary school. She graduated from Ross University School of Medicine in 2008.

While earning her medical degree was no doubt a challenge with two children at home, Dr. Grace Kim sees her story as one that can inspire others. And, indeed, her example appears to have worn off on another family member: her son, Daniel, plans to pursue a career in medicine, as well.

White Coats for New Students

Albany Medical College welcomed the Class of 2018 last month during its traditional White Coat Ceremony. Each incoming student was presented with a white medical coat by a second-year student mentor. This year’s class of 141 students was drawn from more than 9,000 applicants, hails from 21 states and includes 58 students from New York. “This talented and diverse class of scholars will one day become distinguished practitioners in the field of medicine, perhaps even in our community,” said Donald Pritchett, director of admissions at Albany Medical College. “We look forward to helping them fulfill their dreams of becoming physicians.”
The last thing jockey Rosario Montanez remembers before waking up in Albany Med’s Surgical Intensive Care Unit (SICU) on July 19 is coming into the grandstand turn at Saratoga Race Course earlier in the day, two lengths behind the horse in the lead. During the final moments of that race, Montanez’s horse, Piquant, clipped the hoof of another horse, which caused Piquant to stumble and catapult the 23-year-old jockey over his head to the ground. Montanez was then trampled by at least two other horses who were trailing him.

Montanez was rushed to Albany Med and immediately scheduled for surgery with plastic and reconstructive surgeon Ash Patel, MD.

“His nose was badly broken and his eye socket was shattered. Without surgery he would have had difficulty breathing, and he could have had vision problems,” Dr. Patel said.

Montanez also suffered a concussion and several broken ribs from the fall. He spent two days in the SICU before being released, days he said he will never forget.

“Everybody was amazing. From the nurses to the cleaning staff, everyone was extremely polite, and the doctors were on top of everything,” said Montanez. “Dr. Patel and his team went out of their way to visit me and call me. I’ve been to hospitals all around the country—New York City, Philadelphia—and the care I received at those places doesn’t compare to the level of care, compassion and comfort I felt at Albany Med.”

Montanez is receiving follow-up care at Washington Hospital in Pennsylvania, closer to his home. He said his doctor there commended Dr. Patel’s work and added that Montanez can expect to see minimal scarring from the procedures.

“Dr. Patel couldn’t have done a better job,” Montanez said. “I’m honored to have had him work on me.”

Montanez hopes to return to racing in the spring.
Med Students Start the School Year with Service to the Region

Since it was started in 2010 by a medical student from Colorado who wanted to become more involved in her new community, the Albany Medical College “Day of Service” has been so successful that it is now a regular part of incoming student orientation.

Each August, more than 100 first-year students and faculty members volunteer in Capital Region locations, clearing community gardens, working at local farmers’ markets, cooking for the underserved and more.

The goal is to connect students with their new community to help instill the importance of public service.

“Our hope is that students will continue to give back to our community for their entire four years at the College and to develop the lifelong passion for service that comes with being a physician,” said Sonika Raj, medical student coordinator.

Also in August, more than 70 students partnered with the West Hill Ministerial Fellowship to present the 13th annual Carnival on the Hill. The Carnival started as a small block party but has grown into a neighborhood celebration for thousands from the West Hill and Arbor Hill neighborhoods.

The event is part of the College’s Project MedSCOPE (Medical Student Community Outreach for Prevention and Education) in which med students help educate children about healthy living, with a specific focus on underserved neighborhoods around Albany Medical Center.

Esteemed Company

In August, former New York Governor Mario Cuomo (right) and his wife, Matilda Cuomo, visited the Matilda Raffa Cuomo Family Care Corridor in Albany Med’s Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. Albany Med President Jim Barba was on hand to welcome them.