

Mind Matters Challenge winners to present proposals

The six winners are developing programs to help spur concussion culture change

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The [NCAA and the Department of Defense joined ranks](#) and solicited ideas more than a year ago to help spur changes in the culture surrounding concussion.

The partnership's goal is simple but challenging: Create a dynamic in which every head injury is reported and treated, rather than concealed from peers, coaches and commanders.

Launched in November 2014, the Mind Matters Challenge includes \$7 million in funding for a two-pronged approach: one track solicited research proposals designed to improve the understanding of how to spur changes in the culture surrounding concussion; the other was a challenge to develop educational programs and materials that could be implemented immediately. [Twenty-two finalists for the research challenge were named in July](#). As many as 10 winners from that pool – each eligible for a \$400,000 award – will be named during an event on Feb. 5 in Indianapolis.

At that same event, the six education challenge winners, who were announced in July and have received funding to develop compelling educational platforms, will be presented. Each winner has been awarded a \$25,000 cash prize as well as a \$75,000 production budget to develop his or her product. Each proposal seeks to not only educate young athletes and other at-risk populations about concussion, but to make them feel comfortable – if not compelled – to report them. How do they plan to do it? Find out:

Chestnut Hill College (Division II) – Peer Concussion Education Program

Chestnut Hill hopes to change concussion reporting efforts through a peer-to-peer model. The college currently trains two student-athletes per team to serve as peer concussion educators, who teach their teammates about concussion, facilitate self-reporting and keep an eye out for teammates who may have suffered a head injury. William Ernst, a clinical neuropsychologist and assistant professor of psychology at Chestnut Hill, said the goal is to change the culture surrounding concussion from inside the team rather than relying on outside experts to have a significant impact.

Leaders on Chestnut Hill's campus provided input during the program's development, including the athletics department and student life representatives.

“The only thing that was somewhat unexpected was the degree to which student-athletes that have participated in the program thus far have embraced it,” Ernst said. “Their enthusiasm and candor regarding the importance of concussion education and the challenges associated with self-reporting concussion symptoms has been very impressive.”

Currently, the women's soccer and men's lacrosse teams are taking part, but the school hopes to spread the program to all appropriate teams on campus and, eventually, disseminate it to other institutions.

Creative Street Entertainment – A Concussion Story: Pick Your Perspective/Pick Your Path

To personalize the learning experience, Steven Nels Katzenberger and his Indianapolis-based firm are creating an interactive application that will allow users to experience a story about an athlete suffering a concussion, then use questions to choose their own path through the story that unfolds after the injury. The user can choose the perspective of the injured athlete, a coach or an athletic trainer, among others. Katzenberger feels various sports can replicate the idea, which can also be applied to a military storyline.

“We decided this would be an interesting way for young viewers and learners to better understand that a concussion is a serious medical condition requiring appropriate treatment and that they act accordingly,” Katzenberger said. “We feel by producing an online interactive e-learning experience that will illustrate the ramifications of making right – as well as wrong – decisions throughout the process of dealing with concussions may help in that effort.”

Johnson C. Smith University (Division II) – Know Your Brain app

Know Your Brain, which is currently in development by a team from Johnson C. Smith that includes athletic trainers Rennae Williams Stowe and Kathryn Hanes-Romano, is a game-based app with two primary components. The first is a digital rendering of a “whack-a-mole” game that yields descriptions of the symptoms and consequences of brain injury.

The second game simulates the experience of playing memory games for someone who has a concussion. It uses the mobile device's screen to feign blurred vision in order to disrupt concentration as users attempt to work through the puzzles. The app is designed to help athletes, particularly those who have never suffered a concussion, instantly recognize the condition's effects in case they suffer one on the field. Beyond the games, the app is loaded with educational information and a video of student-athletes discussing their concussion experiences, symptoms and the long-term effects. “Ultimately our goal is that more athletes will report their symptoms sooner and follow proper protocols set forth by sports medicine professionals,” Stowe said.

MomsTEAM Institute – Creating a Safe Concussion Reporting Environment: A Multimedia Approach

The MomsTEAM Institute, which has worked to educate people about concussion in sports for the past 15 years, has proposed a comprehensive approach to furthering that education throughout the NCAA. It hopes to update its documentary, “The Smartest Team,” which is regularly featured on Public Broadcasting Service stations throughout the country. The group will redesign and expand its website, adding a larger volume of material that will include educational videos, infographics, workbooks and best practices. The library of material is to be

developed by MomsTEAM staff in conjunction with concussion experts the group has partnered with nationwide.

Additionally, the group plans to launch a vast social media campaign to target its core audience of young athletes. Through all of those methods, MomsTEAM hopes to create a safe reporting environment for student-athletes and teach them that honesty will benefit their short- and long-term health. “If student-athletes are to feel safe honestly self-reporting concussion symptoms, they will need to get the social support they need in their large networks of online ‘friends,’ ” MomsTEAM representatives wrote in their education challenge proposal.

University of Arizona (Division I)/Concussion Discussion – BrainGainz app

Developed by a team from the University of Arizona, BrainGainz is a virtual reality smartphone app designed to immerse college athletes in a realistic experience that mirrors playing football and suffering a concussion. Developers are working with Scooby Wright, a University of Arizona football player, to ensure the realism of a storyline that simulates the physical effects and potential consequences of a concussion. The story within the app is designed to show that athletes not only hurt themselves by not reporting a concussion, but that their decision to take the field without all of their mental faculties can have a detrimental effect on their team’s success.

The app is designed to be used along with Google Cardboard, which turns a smartphone into a de facto virtual reality headset. Simulating the blurred vision, delayed reaction time and sensitivity to light that follow a digital version of Wright delivering a hit should make athletes much better attuned to concussion symptoms than they might be after simply being told about them, said Ricardo Valerdi, an associate professor of systems and industrial engineering at Arizona who is involved in the project. “If I can experience it in a vivid, virtual reality, three-dimensional way, I’m more likely to understand what a concussion is,” he said.

Valerdi’s eventual goal: For sports medicine staff to direct athletes to use the app before the season so they’re familiar with concussion symptoms and, perhaps more importantly, to understand that trying to hide a concussion could hurt them and their team.

University of South Alabama (Division I) – Concussion Awareness Program

The core of South Alabama’s approach is a video focused on concussion education, which is part of a larger website and app. The video is filled with NCAA athletes telling stories about their experiences. While the video focuses partly on identifying symptoms, it’s primarily designed to encourage students to communicate with fellow students and influence their willingness in reporting a concussion and sticking with the appropriate protocols through recovery. Beyond the video, the website and app include neurocognitive tests and some educational materials.

“In the past, reporting has been one of those things that people didn’t want to do because they had to come out of the game and they didn’t want to let their team down,” said Ashley Marass, a pediatric nurse practitioner and assistant professor at the South Alabama College of Nursing. “We’re trying to change that whole attitude and that thinking. If you don’t tell, you’re going to let your team down because you may not be able to play again.”

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