

INOVA

MAGAZINE

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GAME ON

Robin West, MD, and Inova Sports Medicine Program get athletes back in play

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New Inova Sports Medicine Program to serve athletes of all ages, abilities

PHOTO BY
MIKE MORGAN

For Robin West, MD, peace is found in the locker room.

As former assistant team physician for the Pittsburgh Steelers and former head physician for teams at Carnegie Mellon and University of Pittsburgh, the orthopaedic surgeon relished the process of shepherding players from injury to recovery. “I’m there for one reason: to get the athletes examined, treated and healthy in a timely manner,” Dr. West recounted in a recent journal article she authored. “Sports medicine gives me the opportunity to treat the ‘whole’ patient and to care for active people of all ages.”

The amateur endurance racer and cyclist now brings this same overriding philosophy to Inova as she takes the helm of its newly established Sports Medicine Program. As part of a five- to 10-year plan that includes constructing a regional sports medicine facility, the program will focus on the complete care of athletes of all ages, ranging from injury prevention to acute and chronic injury treatment, performance improvement and comprehensive rehabilitation.

With her college- and NFL-level sports experience, Dr. West — who in kindergarten decided she would one day be an orthopaedic surgeon — was recruited by Inova to shape the mission and goals of the new program, beginning her post as Medical Director in July 2014.

“I’ve watched the development of the facility at the University of Pittsburgh over 12 years, so I’ve seen what works and doesn’t work,” says Dr. West, who was one of only two female orthopaedic surgeons in the NFL. “Our mission is to provide high-level, integrative care to athletes of all ages and abilities and help them maintain an active lifestyle. This is a great area for it — dynamic, sports-minded families and individuals. Busy people need convenient access to premier healthcare.”

MVP

Robin West, MD, is heading up Inova’s new Sports Medicine Program.

Where the Action Is

Robin West, MD, who was an assistant team physician for the Pittsburgh Steelers, is charged with shaping the mission and goals of Inova Sports Medicine Program.



Photo: courtesy of the Pittsburgh Steelers

FORGING PARTNERSHIPS

Before the rise of the Sports Medicine Program, Inova's efforts in the field centered on its group orthopaedic practices peppered around northern Virginia and the Washington, DC, metro area. Board-certified and fellowship-trained physicians specializing in orthopaedics, joint replacement and sports medicine deal with a wide array of common acute and chronic athletic injuries—ranging from anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) tears of the knee to shoulder dislocations and rotator cuff tears to Achilles tendon ruptures—with a variety of inpatient and outpatient treatments and physical therapy offerings.

So what's the difference? "Inova has such a wealth of resources available to treat the active population. Our multidisciplinary approach ties all of those resources together into one system," says Robert Najarian, MD, an orthopaedic surgeon with Inova Medical Group since 2012. "Every patient's time is valuable so having a wide range of services in a one-stop shop allows us to make the overall experience more convenient and efficient," adds Dr. Najarian, who previously served as a team physician at the Ohio State University and as an assistant team physician for USA Rugby and the Columbus Clippers, the Triple A affiliate of the

Cleveland Indians. "Having Dr. West and our strong team of providers definitely puts us on another level within the region and nationally."

Key to the transition of becoming a regional sports medicine hub are partnerships with area high schools and youth leagues as well as possible alliances with college and professional teams.

Dr. West notes that a lot of local high schools have long-standing affiliations with great private practice physicians. She wants to maintain and enhance these relationships. Under the new program, physicians will have better access to the first-class, integrative services of Inova's Sports Medicine Program.

MULTIPLE DISCIPLINES 'UNDER ONE ROOF'

Inova's new all-in-one facility in Fairfax provides access to a wide range of services including sports medicine fellowship trained orthopaedic surgeons, primary care sports medicine physicians, physical therapy, X-ray and ultrasound guided procedures.

Inova's long-standing academic affiliations with Georgetown University and Virginia Commonwealth University may provide regular lecture opportunities to medical school students on sports medicine topics such as ACL

tear prevention and supplements for endurance athletes. An Inova-sponsored fellowship in orthopaedic surgery and primary care sports medicine caps off the program's academic goals, Dr. West says.

"It will be nice to have all that under one roof," she says, noting that the program may also encompass satellite locations for physical therapy. She also envisions a walk-in injury clinic that will facilitate faster care for athletes who might otherwise wait days or weeks to be examined. And recognizing that a young athlete's injury doesn't just affect the player but their parents and siblings as well, the mother

of two notes that the program will also aim to support the entire family unit. Many of her patients comment that Dr. West makes them feel like a professional athlete.

"This is going to be a destination sports medicine program," Dr. West says. "Patients are going to get top-notch care that's comprehensive. We're not just going to treat a stress fracture, for example; we're going to find the reason you have it and determine how to prevent it in the future. We're going to look at the whole problem and the whole person. No matter what age, sport or ability, every patient will be treated like a professional athlete." ■

CONCUSSION CARE

With the prevalence of concussions so closely tied to athletic competition — nearly a half-million sports-related head injuries are treated at U.S. hospitals each year — Inova's new Sports Medicine Program will be tackling some of the biggest remaining questions surrounding these blows to the head and how to maximize players' recovery.

Sports Medicine Medical Director Robin West, MD, plans to collaborate with other Inova initiatives such as the recently created Concussion Program and Inova Translational Medicine Institute (ITMI), which explores the connection between genomics and health. Research

from both programs will enhance concussion treatment offered to athletes, she says.

"Concussion care is a huge part of sports medicine, because athletes often get a concussion at the same time as an ACL tear or another injury," Dr. West says. "Most kids get better quickly and don't have lingering issues, but between 10 percent and 15 percent have persistent symptoms. We can help them achieve a full recovery."

Dr. Jessica Wertz, medical director for Inova Sports Medicine's concussion program, notes that interest in concussion is at an all-time high. "With all the

attention concussions are receiving it was important for us to use an innovative strategy and make resources available to patients within our sports medicine program. Having a convenient location and team assembled for treatment and management of an injury is important but we understand that education is equally valuable," Dr. Wertz says. "Using a proactive approach through baseline testing and educational presentations we provide our athletes and families with the latest information and tools to stay informed when a concussion is suspected."



HEAD SHOT

Find out more about Inova Medical Group Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine at www.inova.org/sportsmedicine.

To schedule an appointment with one of our Sports Medicine providers call 703.970.6464.