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Media Relations

September 10, 2012

UNH Researcher Receives NFL Charities Grant to Advance Work on Football Equipment

Erik Swartz, associate professor of kinesiology at the University of New Hampshire

DURHAM, N.H. – NFL Charities, the charitable foundation of the National Football League owners, has awarded a grant to University of New Hampshire faculty member Erik Swartz to further his ongoing research on

the implications of football helmet, facemask, and shoulder pad design on emergency care for injured players. Swartz, associate professor of athletic training in the department of kinesiology, received \$62,521; his is one of 15 NFL Charities grants totaling more than \$1.5 million that support sports-related medical research.

The grant will allow Swartz, who for a decade has been studying the safe removal of protective equipment like helmets and shoulder pads from athletes who sustain cervical spine or head injuries during play, to work with high-fidelity human patient simulators at WakeMed Health and Hospitals in Raleigh, N.C.

“It’s taking everything we’ve been doing over the past decade to the next level,” says Swartz. He and his collaborators -- Laura Decoster of the New Hampshire Musculoskeletal Institute, Jason Mihalik of the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, and Amar Patel, manager of WakeMed’s Center for Innovative Learning – will use the simulation mannequins to help determine a higher level of effectiveness for their protocols involving treating injured football players on the field.

Working in the 4,000 square-foot WakeMed facility, Swartz and his colleagues will gain information previously unavailable in their work with human subjects. Swartz, who has been researching the most effective way to remove face masks and shoulder pads from an injured player who may need CPR or to be intubated, will now be able to determine, for instance, if it’s possible to support an airway in a player wearing a football helmet. He could also test whether it’s possible to administer CPR over shoulder pads: The mannequin’s sensor will tell him the depth of chest compressions he’s giving.

“It’s mind-boggling, how much these mannequins can tell you,” Swartz says. His ultimate goal is to increase the safety and effectiveness of emergency medical care on the football field.

“We are proud to support sports-related medical research through NFL Charities Medical Research Grants,” says NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell. “These research projects have implications far beyond football, and we are committed to playing a role in helping make sports safer.”

NFL Charities has actively solicited and placed emphasis on research proposals focused on areas including concussion/traumatic brain injury research and cardiovascular research. Three separate

NFL Charities Medical Grant review committees evaluated the 2011 grant proposals based on each committee's area of expertise. Recommendations were submitted to the NFL Charities board of directors for approval.

This year's grants include studies on stem cells and nervous system injuries; MRI methods after concussions; the effect of temperature on the severity of potential brain injuries; the implications of helmet, facemask and shoulder pad designs on airway and cardiovascular care; and a sleep apnea program focused on NFL players.

The NFL has supported sports-related medical research for decades through NFL Charities Medical Research Grants. Since 2000, NFL Charities has committed grants to non-profit medical facilities nationwide, including studies on brain injury, ACL injury prevention and heat stress risks. NFL Charities is a non-profit organization created by the 32 member clubs of the National Football League to enable the teams to collectively make grants to charitable and worthwhile causes on a national scale. Since its inception, NFL Charities has granted more than \$148 million to more than 1,400 different organizations. NFL Charities' primary funding categories include: sports-related medical research and education grants; player foundation grants in support of the philanthropic work of current and former NFL players; financial assistance for former NFL players in need; impact grants to support national youth health and fitness education initiatives as part of a league-wide commitment to fight childhood obesity; and team program grants which supplement the charitable and community activities of the 32 NFL clubs. Learn more about the grants at www.nflcommunications.com.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

Photograph available to download:

http://www.unh.edu/news/cj_nr/2012/feb/bp23swartz.jpg

Caption: Erik Swartz, associate professor of kinesiology at the University of New Hampshire.

Credit: Jeremy Mayhew.

Watch a video of Swartz's research in action here: <http://vimeo.com/32989518>

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