

Opinion

THE BATTALION

Wednesday, August 29, 2001

Worth the sweat?

More in-depth physicals needed for student athletes

Amid the hottest days of summer, student athletes across the nation are practicing to prepare themselves for the upcoming season. While this is not unusual, it can have deadly results. Student athletes in Texas are required to undergo a routine physical by a family or school-appointed physician before they are permitted to participate in any athletic activities.



BRIENNE PORTER

These physicals include questions about heart problems. Yet, in light of recent deaths of high school football players, it is obvious that these exams are not adequate. With the heat and strenuous activity, the bodies and hearts of these athletes are trained to the max.

A more in-depth physical, including electrocardiography (EKG) to test the functions of the heart, should be given to the athletes before they are allowed to participate. Schools and families should spare no expense to make sure that their young athletes are fit to handle the workouts associated with sports.

Leonard Carter II was a 14-year-old football player for Lamar High School in Houston. He died Aug. 18 after he collapsed on the practice field. The cause of his death was not heart related but instead, hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, which is an asymmetry of the heart muscles. According to Dr. Albert Hergenroeder, chief of the sports medicine clinic at Texas

Children's Hospital, "the leading cause of death among young athletes during exercise is a cardiac condition." Knowing that fact, parents and school officials should find a solution to this problem. If it warrants more expensive medical tests, then schools and parents should pay for the tests. They will then be able to rest with the knowledge that they have done everything possible to ensure the safety of their student athletes.

The type of heart condition Carter had is not easily detected, but with an EKG, his problem could have been discovered. Students are asked specific questions during their physical about possible conditions they could have.

According to Dr. Hergenroeder, students can answer "no" to both ques-

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tions [during the physical] and still suffer from the potentially fatal condition. There are other types of cardiac problems, such as arrhythmia and pericarditis, that also can be found with an EKG and could potentially save the life of a young athlete. Officials are ignoring the fact that an undetected problem could cause athletes to collapse at any moment — as Carter did — by not requiring these tests prior to practice.

The University Interscholastic League (UIL), the governing organization for high school athletics in Texas, has formed a medical advisory committee. The committee will consist of five physicians, two athletic trainers and one representative of the Texas High School Coaches Association. The committee's recommendations will be added to current UIL materials.

The ability of the committee to protect the safety of student athletes should not be hindered by mere recommendations. If the committee is able to find a solution to help detect these heart problems, they should not stop at suggestions. According to Carol Christian, a staff writer for the Houston Chronicle, "In the past decade, a number of other athletes — from high school to professional — have died with enlarged hearts." The list of athletes who have



With current advanced medical knowledge and technology, many of these deaths can and should be prevented.

school officials and parents should make sure that student athletes do not have an undiagnosed problem. These tests should be done, and those involved should be certain that athletes are physically prepared for the strenuous activities they participate in.

Brienne Porter is a junior political science major.

died includes Texas A&M football player James Glenn, who died in 1991 with an enlarged heart — a condition that although he may have been born with but not properly diagnosed in his physical. If there are tests to prevent these tragedies, all athletes should be required to undergo them.

MAIL CALL

Gov. Perry's welcome

I would like to welcome you to one of Texas' premiere universities. As you may know, Texas A&M is very close to my heart, having graduated from there nearly 30 years ago. As a former student, I see the Aggie spirit at work every day in both my personal and professional lives. Let me say that your stay at A&M undoubtedly will present many new challenges, but it also will afford you many opportunities in return.

Aggieland is an amazing place of unparalleled spirit and unrivaled tradition. You may not realize it right now; you may not even want to contemplate it, but 20 or 30 years down the road, you will see how blessed you have been to attend a great institution such as Texas A&M. You will see the difference it will make in your quality of life and in providing you greater opportunity and freedom.

As you begin your journey toward opportunity, I encourage you to make the most of your years here at Texas A&M. Study hard, get involved, explore the world, expand your minds and have fun.

And remember that education is the catalyst between potential and success. With your continuing effort to build yourself academically and morally, you lay the foundation for future professional and personal success.

I wish you the best over the next four years in Aggieland and in all of your future endeavors.

Gov. Rick Perry '72

In Rowan's defense

In response to Rolando Garcia's Aug. 28th article.

It should be mentioned that the drinking age is lower (18) in Italy than it is here in the USA (21). When on Italian grounds, anyone 18 and older is allowed, by law, to drink alcoholic beverages. The use of the word "minor" is somewhat misleading in the article because technically, the freshmen were not. Taking for granted that all the freshmen were over the age of 18, there was nothing legally wrong with what they did in Italy.

Travis Strow '02

EDITOR'S NOTE: Despite the legal drinking age in Italy, Appendix VIII of the Texas A&M Student rules states, "Any situation sponsored, authorized, sanctioned, endorsed and/or financed by an undergraduate student organization must be in compliance with any applicable laws and rules of the state, county, city and Texas A&M University. ... A student found guilty of noncompliance with these rules or the laws of the state of Texas has committed a violation of University Student Rules and is subject to sanctions commensurate with the offense and any aggravating and mitigating circumstances."

Get off the stem cell research bandwagon

In response to Tim Dyll's Aug. 28th column.

Tim Dyll is on the stem cell research bandwagon, but his band is playing a funeral dirge. He cites the potential, undiscovered, possible, unknown benefits of stem cell research as justification for the wholesale destruction of human embryos. Since they are "slated for destruction" anyway, he argues, why not use them for this as-yet-unproven benefit to society?

Well, Mr. Dyll, since you are ultimately going to die anyway, we'll just euthanize you (without your consent, of course) and give your body to science. There are proven uses for your body, after all; for example, we know that we can use many of your internal organs to help people in need of transplants.

Mr. Dyll and others of his persuasion have lost sight of the fact that human life is not a commodity to be bought and sold. Human beings are "endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights," the foremost of which is the right to life.

For the sake of our nation and our world, for the greatest long-term benefit to society, we must never lose sight of that fact.

Jon Gardner '89

THE RIGHT NOT TO STUFF

Millions of people fearfully dread the thought of one day being diagnosed with one of the world's deadliest diseases — cancer.

While medical advancements in the ongoing battle to defeat this horrendous illness are showing significant progress, Americans were shocked to hear that Robert Courtney, a pharmacist in Missouri, was arrested and charged with diluting the dosage of two forms of chemotherapy drugs to levels far below those prescribed by doctors.

Tragically, his incentive in weakening the drugs was so that he could increase the profitability of his privately owned pharmacy.

Meanwhile, Courtney remains jailed without bond, the extent of the irreparable damage he caused his patients has eroded the precious trust that was once placed within the medical profession.

Although typically regarded as a vicious-painstaking form of treatment for millions of victims and survivors of cancer, chemotherapy treatment is often an unfortunate necessity to defeat this potentially life claiming illness. According to The Associated Press, the handling and mixing of these chemotherapy drugs, which are intended to kill human cells, was at one time a process that was handled by Kansas City nurses. However, their fear of having to handle such a deadly drug, gave private pharmacies in the region the opportunity to provide doctors with ready-to-use, premixed chemotherapy compounds.

Ironically, Courtney once was hailed as a pioneer in his field after becoming one of the first pharmacists in his area to perform such a task. Now, he has placed hundreds of innocent victims who received these drugs from his pharmacy in serious danger.

According to Dr. Jack Rosenburg, director of the International Drug Information Center at New York's Long Island University, what is even more troubling is that, depending on the degree of dilution, "instead of killing the cancer, you get a partial kill of the cells and then a more resistant type of cancer coming out." Patients

who were vigorously waging a battle for their lives by having chemotherapy administered to them, can now potentially be faced with more serious complications because of Courtney's violations of the law.

Investigators with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) contend that samples they obtained of the expensive chemotherapy drugs were diluted to levels anywhere from 39 percent to as low as 1 percent, which resulted in Courtney saving hundreds of dollars per dose. According to CNN, the investigators accidentally discovered this alarming evidence after a sales representative for Eli Lilly and Company, maker of the high-priced chemotherapy drug Gemzar, stumbled across a discrepancy between the amount Courtney had purchased and the amount he had supposedly provided and billed Kansas City physicians.

Courtney has destroyed the intentions of working as a health-care provider entirely and has since been stripped of his state and federal pharmaceutical licenses. Several medical professionals in the field were

astounded at the news of these flagrant ethical and moral violations. Dr. Michael Coyne, associate vice president and director of pharmacology at

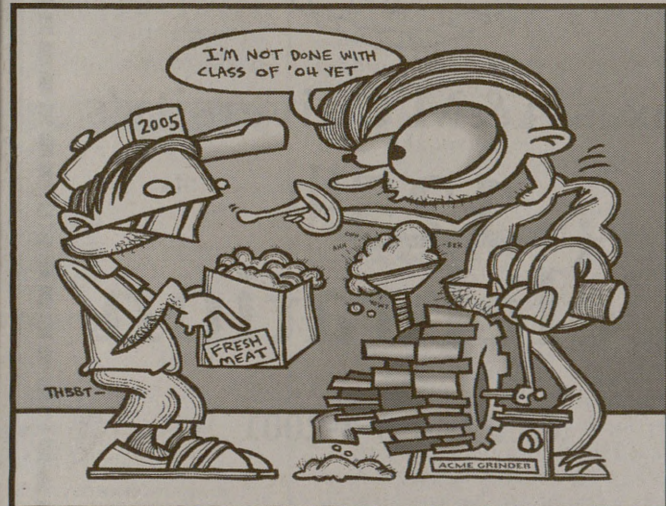
New York's Staten Island University Hospital said that, "everyone — all of my colleagues — were shocked." Even the most devious pharmacist in the country could not dream this one up."

Patrick McInerney, an attorney with the Kansas City Internal Medicine clinic, agrees that Courtney's actions were hard to believe. "It is draining. For many of these doctors, staffs and nurses, fighting cancer is their life's work. They have lived and grieved and fought for their patients."

Hopefully, if and when prosecutors prevail in convicting Courtney of the 20 felony counts he has been charged with, his legacy should undoubtedly be remembered as one that is along the same lines as a greedy murderer. Although it might be too late to change the circumstances of Courtney's cowardly actions or bring back to life those who died, something should be done to ensure that similar crimes never happen again.

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CARTOON OF THE DAY



THE UN-CARTOONIST ©

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