


European Athletics Medical Seminar

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Amsterdam, The Netherlands

European Athletics staged its first-ever Medical Seminar at the *Vrije Universiteit* (Free University) in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, from 3 to 4 July 2016. The seminar, which was organised in the Dutch capital to take advantage of the presence of national team doctors attending the 2016 European Athletics Championships, attracted 54 participants from 29 countries.

The idea for the seminar came originally from the European Athletics Medical & Anti-Doping Commission. Chairman Pedro Branco, MD, (POR) said “the Commission thought a seminar would be a good way to start an exchange of best practice and ideas for the benefit of the athletes and the sport.”

“Most team doctors have been working in their federations for 10 or even 20 years and they really know the elite athletes, and what’s happening in sports medicine. We all kind of know each other from coming to championships year after year, but the fact is we really don’t communicate much.

Top experts from the sports medicine community were invited to present on their specialist areas and the agenda for the seminar covered standard medical treatment, physiotherapy, nutrition and the fight against doping. Also included were research projects to help the community better understand the types and incidence of injuries in athletics and the way Member Federations are organised to provide services to athletes.

The seminar venue was only two kilometres from the stadium where the Championships would start two days later.

This report provides an overview of the topics covered and some of the main points made by the presenters.

Day One

The topics addressed on the seminar’s first day were the challenges in the fields of standard medical treatment and physiotherapy for injuries commonly seen in athletes and how national athletics federations are organised to deal with these.

Dr Branco and Frédéric Depiesse, MD, (FRA), a member of the International Association of Athletics Federation (IAAF) Medical Commission led the initial discussion of medical issues. In his presentation Depiesse looked at new therapy known as stem cell treatment, including both the medical implications for athletics and the ethical issues surrounding its use. He compared it with platelet rich plasma (*PRP*) therapy, also a new form of treatment that relieves pain by promoting long-lasting healing of musculoskeletal conditions using the healing power of one’s body.

“Our knowledge is growing, but maybe not at the same speed as sport performance and technology,” Depiesse said in his closing remarks. “That is why we need to increase our knowledge and for that, we need to be all together.”

Angel Basas (ESP), the head of physiotherapy at the Royal Spanish Athletics Federation, led a discussion on physio treatment of common injuries. Among his messages were that athletes recovering from injuries must avoid both overstimulation and excessive rest as both slow down the recovery process.

Alma Kajeniene, MD, PhD, (LIT) and Roswitha Gerdes-Kuhn, MD, (GER), who are both members of the IAAF Medical Commission, delivered a presentation entitled “Pre-Participation Medical Examination (PPME)”, explaining how PPMEs are used to screen athletes for illness and musculoskeletal weaknesses that might result in injuries.

The day ended with participants receiving a questionnaire aimed at helping European Athletics understand how different countries' medical services function and how they might be supported. Among the areas of interest in the survey was the identification of which federations offered PPMEs or more general Periodic Health Evaluations (PHE) to their athletes.

Day Two

The topics covered on the second day included the results of European Athletics' long-term injury and illness prevention study, sport nutrition and the fight against doping.

Pascal Edouard, MD, PhD, (FRA), a member of the French athletics federation's Medical Commission and a researcher at the University of Lyon, started the day with a presentation on the injury and illness surveillance studies that have been conducted during each European Athletics Championships since 2010 in a bid to determine the incidence and the characteristics of injury and illness that occur during the event. A detailed report on the project and its initial findings was published in issue 3/2015 of *New Studies in Athletics*.

“The aim now is to go a step further by giving information to medical teams to help them to understand the risks to athletes at the

Championships, and to help them address the risks,” said Dr Edouard.

Sport nutrition expert Monica Sousa, PhD, (POR) made the next presentation entitled “Food vs Supplements”, which focused on nutritional support for recovery from exercise-induced muscle damage. In it she discussed her thesis, which compared the effect of ingesting a commercial or homemade recovery beverage with similar nutritional content after exhaustive eccentric exercise on muscle damage, functional recovery, soreness markers, inflammation, oxidative stress, and metabolic parameters.

Concluding the seminar was a presentation by Tiia Kuuranne (FIN), the newly appointed director of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) accredited laboratory in Lausanne and a Member of European Athletics' Medical & Anti-Doping Commission. Her main point was that team doctors need to be up to date with anti-doping regulations so they can inform athletes, citing the situation surrounding the substance meldonium, banned on 1 January 2016, and the suspension of tennis player Maria Sharapova as an example of what can happen.

“I think one message to take home is to be aware of the information that is available and if it is not something that is delivered to the medical doctors, they should also be aware automatically of [the importance of] seeking the instructions with respect to anti-doping regulations.”

Looking Ahead

After her presentation Mrs Kuuranne said “coming to the seminar from the laboratory instead of as a medical doctor I found it was interesting to hear about things that take place but are not really visible for the public - the organisation behind the championships and how well the medical doctors advise them [the athletes].”

“I like the idea of them having a meeting before the competition to network - it is an effective way to share information.”

Dr Branco said he was pleased with outcome of the seminar and hoped it would develop in the future, with a likely re-convening of this year’s participants ahead of the 2018 European Athletics Championships scheduled to take place in the German capital Berlin.

“We will try to continue the seminar and build it up with more countries,” he said. “Then perhaps we can start working groups or consensus groups, and maybe we can have a standard voice throughout Europe regarding the healthcare of our athletes.”

Doping Control at the Championships

In the days following the seminar an extensive anti-doping testing programme was conducted for the European Athletics Championships in collaboration with the IAAF. More than 100 blood samples and around 200 urine samples were collected as part of a plan in-

volving target testing for specific analysis as well as random testing for track, field and road events.

Competitors at the Championships, meanwhile, were invited to show their commitment to a doping-free sport by wearing an anti-doping message on their bibs. The bibs carried the messages “I Run Clean”, “I Jump Clean”, “I Throw Clean”, and “I Am Clean” for combined events.

The initiative was similar to that created by European Athletics for the 2015 SPAR European Cross Country Championships in Hyères, France, where competing runners were invited by European Athletics to carry an “I Run Clean” message on their bibs.

Reported by Daniel Etchells

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