

Dr. Bennet Omalu, Brain Injury Research Institute: B/R Exclusive Interview

By
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The issue of helmet-to-helmet hits in the NFL and the traumatic head injuries that result is rising to the forefront of the public eye.

But this issue reaches far beyond professional football.

High school students also face the same dangers, and lay their bodies on the line week-in and week-out. The only difference is, those punishing hits aren't nationally televised, and replayed dozens of times on ESPN.

bleacherreport.com/.../498005-dr-ben...

Students don't face suspension or fines for these hits, either.

I spoke with Dr. Bennet Omalu, a founding member of the Brain Injury Research Institute, back in February. Three days prior, he had given a lecture on the issue at a congressional hearing in Houston, TX.

His message was grim, to say the least.

We are led to believe that concussions are minor, that a player should be ready to suit up as little as one week after suffering a traumatic brain injury. Omalu says, "If you were to fracture a bone in your leg, you would be kept out of play for about six to 12 weeks. Concussions are like fractures of the microskeleton of your brain cells. Your brain does not have the ability to heal itself. You can only lose your brain cells, you cannot make new ones."

This is scary news, especially for some who have suffered multiple concussions in their lifetime.

But I learned that it can take as few as one concussion to a high school student's developing brain to cause permanent brain damage. "I have seen cases in my practice where somebody sustains just one episode of traumatic brain injury that would manifest with sustained cognitive impairment (and) memory impairment."

Perhaps the problem isn't the crushing blows, after all. Perhaps the real problem is how we treat them.

In that regard, Omalu provides a glimmer of hope. It starts with players taking an appropriate amount of time off the field after a concussion.

But it goes much further than that.

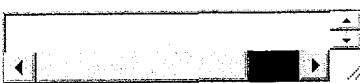
He has been researching a drug cocktail that could help cure concussions, and help avoid the risk of long-term side effects.

"I have personally proposed a drug cocktail based on my knowledge, research, and findings on the cases I have done. I strongly believe that I have identified a cocktail of drugs that would actually cure concussions, and would also prevent concussions from progressing to permanent brain damage. And for those who have already developed brain damage, we could give them this cocktail to impede the progression of the brain damage."

All he is asking for is funding.

With proper research and analysis on both active and retired players, Omalu suggests he could perfect the cocktail. "We don't have anything to lose."

Maybe the league should take all the money they've made on the fines for these hits, and put it toward brain injury research. \$175,000 is a pretty hefty contribution, and who knows, it could go a long way.



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