

SENATE COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL CONCERNS
MINUTES OF MEETING

March 28, 2011

Morrill Hall Room 238A

[In these minutes: nutrition information for athletes; committee business]

[These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate; none of the comments, conclusions or actions reported in these minutes represent the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate, the Administration or the Board of Regents.]

PRESENT: Timothy Sheldon (Chair), Sandra Krebsbach, Rebecca von Dissen, Teresa Schicker, Elizabeth Ault, Michael O'Day, Ahmed Heikal, Kim Robien, Jenny Weber, Joseph Marchesani, Leah Iverson, Maria Hanratty

REGRETS: Amelious Whyte, Lisa Pogoff, Marynel Ryan Van Zee

ABSENT: Susan Cable Morrison, Kirsten Makarov, Rebecca Shankle, John Broadhurst, Marissa Wagar, David Golden, Michael Sommers, Elizabeth Shay

GUESTS: Moira Novak, M.D., (Director of Athletic Medicine), Rasa Troupe (Sports Dietician), Sarah Wiley (Associate Director of Strength and Conditioning)

Timothy Sheldon called the meeting to order, and asked for introductions.

Nutrition Counseling for Athletes

Mr. Sheldon introduced the topic and informed the speakers that the committee was interested in learning how athletes are prepared and directed with regard to nutrition and health while they are at the University and as they are preparing to leave.

Moira Novak, M.D., Director of Athletic Medicine, introduced herself, Rasa Troupe, and Sarah Wiley. She explained that Ms. Troupe is a registered dietician who contracts with the University of Minnesota. Ms. Wiley is the Associate Director of Strength and Conditioning.

Dr. Novak stated that she and Ms. Wiley are part of the nutritional counseling committee for student athletes. This is a committee that she organized to consider issues in athletics and how best to support the athletes in their athletic performance and weight management. The other members of the committee are team physicians, Dr. Susan Hecht and Dr. Dave Olson, Food Science and Nutrition Studies professor and Faculty Representative, Linda Brady, and Director of Athletic Compliance, J.T. Bruett. The committee reviews the general guidelines provided to student athletes regarding issues such as hydration, and recommendations on macro and micro nutrients. Dr. Novak noted that student-athletes arrive with widely varying knowledge about nutrition.

She went on to state that she oversees the staff of athletic trainers and they work on all of the athletes' health issues. The strength and conditioning coaches are also resources for the athletes, and the trainers partner with them in meeting the athletes nutrition needs.

She noted the power of the nutritional supplement industry and how it targets student athletes. She stated students are often overloaded with information on nutritional supplements, and the athletic training staff tries to educate athletes about the supplements and teaches them to be wise consumers.

Ms. Wiley noted that athletes often ask her specific questions about gaining and losing weight. She provides them with good general nutrition information, and if more specifics are needed she refers them to Ms. Troupe.

Ms. Troupe stated she has a contract with the track and field and cross-country teams, and sometimes athletic trainers refer athletes from other teams to her for specific nutrition advice. For the cross-country team she provides: individual consulting; once-a-semester lectures for throwers, jumpers, and distance crews; and weekly information tips that are specific to the time of year such as information on hydration during the winter. She also has individual appointments for client specific needs such as weight loss or gain, vitamin and mineral deficiencies, and medical nutrition therapy. She refers eating disorder cases to University psychologists and in some cases to outside therapists.

Mr. Sheldon asked the speakers to give an overview of the types of nutrition information student athletes receive when they enter the University, during their athletic careers, and when they leave the University. Dr. Novak responded from a perspective of medical oversight. She stated that when student athletes enter the University athletics program they receive a medical examination and fill out a lengthy medical history questionnaire. The team physicians review the history and make recommendations and referrals as necessary. The coaches work within NCAA rules in terms of practice and playing seasons. Training table meals are only provided for some of the teams: typically, football, men's and women's basketball, and occasionally hockey. When teams travel meals are provided for all of the team members.

Athletes' medical needs are primarily met by University physicians. There are five family medicine physicians that have clinic on a daily basis at the Bierman Field Athletic Training Room. Athletic Medicine also works with five orthopedic physicians. If athletes have other needs, they are referred to the University's subspecialists. If needed, athletes are referred to outside programs such as the Emily Program for eating disorders.

At the beginning of their seasons, student athletes receive one team nutritional counseling session that is paid for by the Athletic Medicine budget. If teams want additional nutritional counseling they must use their team budgets. If there are unique medical issues that Athletic Medicine wants to have Ms. Troupe consult on, they are paid for by Athletic Medicine.

When students complete their athletic careers at the University, there is an exit evaluation process. At this time, students declare any injuries received as a result of participation in athletics. Students are given the option of seeing physicians at this time, and receiving medical care if necessary. With regard to weight management, Dr. Novak noted that Athletic Medicine does not do a lot of counseling or follow up upon completion of an athlete's career. However, if a student athlete has received treatment for an eating disorder during their athletic careers, Athletic Medicine recognizes there is a life time risk, and tries to help continue them in counseling. Dr. Novak also noted that Dr. Hecht received an NFL grant to study the long term impacts of playing football, and Dr. Novak would like the University of Minnesota players to participate in this study.

Ms. Wiley noted anecdotally that many football players have relayed to her that they could not possibly continue to eat the quantities that they consumed when playing competitively.

Ms. Troupe stated that while they are at the University of Minnesota, track and field athletes are able to contact her at anytime regarding nutrition issues. She tries to provide them with life-long nutrition skills in addition to assisting with performance nutrition, and some athletes continue to see her after graduation.

Joseph Marchesani explained his background as a former football player and coach, and expressed concern about encouraging football players to gain weight beyond the level the human body is designed to maintain. He asked if the University has an obligation to let them know it is not healthy to maintain the extreme weight required to be a competitive football player. Ms. Troupe stated that she does not consult with the football team, but in preparation for meeting with the Social Concerns Committee she reviewed information on what other universities do to help athletes transition to life after Big 10 athletics. She mentioned that Indiana University has a unique program designed to assist athletes in their lives after the completion of their college athletic careers, and noted that they hired a full time sports nutrition director.

Dr. Novak stated that it is difficult to connect with student athletes when they are in the prime of their athletic careers because they do not believe physical problems will happen to them. She also noted that Athletic Medicine has little contact with many athletes after they complete their last game. She also recognized the validity of Mr. Marchesani's concern. She stated that research shows there are serious long-term health consequences for football players. Professor Maria Hanratty asked if there could be some type of intervention before an athlete's last game. Dr. Novak noted that classes on life after Big 10 athletics are offered, but these are geared primarily toward career goals and personal development. She told the committee about CHAMPS, a life skills program that helps fill any voids in student athletes' education and experience. She noted the challenge of providing information to student-athletes when they need it, and stated she would like to create a method of identifying athletes that are at risk for later health issues. She noted the effort to intervene needs to be with all athletes not just football players, and gave examples of weight and body composition issues faced by throwers and sprinters after completion of their athletic careers.

Jenny Weber commented that she was a member of the University of Minnesota gymnastics team and she did not expect the University to provide nutrition information after she left the team. She also asked Ms. Troupe how the University could insure that a weight loss recommendations made to athletes are based on health and performance and not appearance.

Ms. Troupe responded that she looks at an athlete's body fat. She also intervenes on behalf of athletes with their coaches. She may have to educate coaches about performance and body weight. Ms. Weber asked how University Athletics insures that trainers and coaches are communicating. Ms. Troupe noted that the trainers must care for the athlete's privacy and they ask the athletes what information they want to have shared with their coaches. Ms. Troupe stated she communicates with all parties involved.

Sandra Krebsbach asked if any information is provided to athletes about how to taper back on their activity level. Ms. Wiley noted that many athletes enjoy continuing to work out and actually return to the trainers to visit and work out with them. Ms. Wiley commented that it is important to consider the role of individual responsibility in nutrition and exercise.

A committee member inquired, if health information is generally considered private, why is health information about athletes regularly reported in the newspaper. Dr. Novak responded that she consults with the University's HIPPA compliance officers on this issue, and athletes also sign a waiver allowing disclosure of health information from physicians to trainers and coaches. If an injury is publicly witnessed she provides general information about the injury to the public. If an athlete shares health information of a sensitive nature with her she may encourage the athlete to disclose the information to their coaches, but she emphasized the need to preserve the athlete's privacy.

Professor Ahmed Heikal asked why the nutrition supplement industry is not regulated. Professor Kim Robien responded that there is a federal law that prohibits regulation of supplements as drugs. Supplements are considered food, and therefore fall outside of Food and Drug Administration regulation.

Elizabeth Ault asked how the health and nutrition information available to athletes compares to that available for other students. Dr. Novak responded that there are two nutritionists on staff at Boynton Health Services. Student athletes receive more exposure to nutritional advice because they have a greater need. Ms. Troupe noted that in 2006 she gave a free seminar on nutrition that was open to the campus.

Mr. Sheldon thanked the guests for their presentation, and Dr. Novak asked the committee to let her know of any ideas they generate on the issue of providing nutrition advice to athletes.

The committee discussed the issue of coaches asking athletes to lose weight and athletes' knowledge of available resources. The power dynamic between coaches and athletes was also discussed.

Mr. Sheldon noted that the athletic department is already taking steps to provide athletes with nutrition information, but asked the committee if it would be helpful to encourage the athletic department to provide further information to athletes when they are completing their athletic careers.

Professor Hanratty asked if there is research on what happens to athletes after their athletic careers end. Mr. Marchesani noted the research on brain trauma to football players. Professor Robien responded that most of the research she is familiar with is on performance. Mr. Sheldon asked if a committee member would follow up on the information provided about the University of Indiana and the study being conducted by Dr. Hecht. Mr. Marchesani indicated that he would provide a follow up report to the committee.

New/Old Business

Mr. Sheldon stated that at its April meeting, the committee would be considering whether to pursue two topics brought by committee member Teresa Schicker: (1) encouraging the use of smart grid technology at the Twin Cities campus, and (2) campus accessibility during light rail construction.

Mr. Sheldon provided follow up information on two issues the committee considered earlier in the year. He stated the University Senate would be considering the Equity During Budget Cuts Resolution on Thursday. And that a consultant was hired to provide an independent review of the results of the Women's Faculty Cabinet gender equity study.

Mr. Marchesani asked the committee to consider sending a letter to the athletics department thanking them for the work they are presently doing on nutrition for athletes, and providing suggestions from the committee for additional things that can be done. Ms. Schicker concurred stating she believes the University owes a duty to these athletes.

Hearing no further business, Mr. Sheldon adjourned the meeting.

Dawn Zugay
University Senate Office