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For Immediate Release

April 15, 2015

Association of Ringside Physicians Releases Consensus Statement On Down Syndrome and Combat Sports

The Association of Ringside Physicians (ARP), an international, non-profit organization dedicated to the health and safety of the boxer and mixed martial arts athlete, has released a consensus statement on Down syndrome and combat sports as follows:

Medical Concerns

Down syndrome presents several medical problems relative to combat sports. These include risks of cervical spine instability (with risk of odontoid subluxation, paralysis, and death), oropharyngeal issues (which airway management more difficult including ventilation and intubation), and cardiac issues. Also, while it is possible to assess the cognitive ability of a person with Down syndrome, assessing a change after a concussion becomes even more difficult.

Additionally, individuals with Down syndrome have a considerably increased risk of developing Alzheimer's disease. Almost all individuals with Down syndrome will have significant amounts of the main neuropathological features of Alzheimer's disease formed in their brains by age 40. This coupled with the fact that head/brain trauma is a risk factor for Alzheimer's disease and repetitive concussive/sub-concussive head trauma has been associated with some features of Alzheimer's disease suggests that these individuals would be exposed to an increased risk of both earlier onset and increased degree of brain dysfunction by participating in combat sports.

Ethical Concerns

There are two ethical dilemmas. The first is that combat sports can be dangerous. To what extent is an individual with Down syndrome (severity of same considered) capable of understanding the damage and risks of combat arts, and are they considered competent to consent to it?

The second dilemma relates directly to the idea that combat sports are not like other sports. They have an additional component that other sports do not. Their very nature lends itself to misperceptions of violence in the public and media's eyes. One of the very purposes of commissions, sanctioning bodies, and even the ARP is to try to limit the actual violence and inappropriate or even illegal behaviors that have historically been part of combat arts in order to have it become a more pure, more technical sport. No matter how genuine of intention even an exhibition match may be, the cost of any type of bad outcome such as a medical complication, a controversial call, or any type of injury to either fighter comes at a very high price to all involved. (Of note, the



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Special Olympics does not have combat sports.)

Legal Consideration

Under the Americans With Disabilities Act, "reasonable accommodation" must be provided, in the work place and in all public facilities, to a person with a disability. Simply stated though, there is no such "reasonable accommodation" for an individual afflicted with Down Syndrome to participate in combat sports.

Conclusion

Given the significant medical risks and ethical conflicts persons with Down syndrome should not spar or compete in combat sports.

For more about the ARP, visit its website at www.associationofringsidephysicians.org.

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