

## The Scorpions' Tale – Physicians Alleviate the Sting of Hockey Injuries

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QuestCorp Media



The New Mexico Scorpions hockey team enjoys the thrill of victory. So do the physicians at New Mexico Orthopaedics. But they know they will be on the ice to ease the agony of defeat. The Scorpions count on these dedicated professionals for periodic physicals and medical support at every game.

Central Hockey League rules dictate that a physician must be present before a hockey game can start. “We just finished our ninth season, and our physicians are very important to us,” says Phil Valk, the team’s Vice President. “When the physicians first started working with our team, they thought they would have to force themselves to watch the games. But after the third game, they were bringing their families and fighting amongst themselves for the tickets.”

Physicians sit in a private box “on the glass” not far from the coaching staff. “If a problem arises, we signal them from the bench to show that they are needed in the back, but usually, they already know,” says Valk.

The training room is usually abuzz with activity. “The physicians care for our team as well as the visiting team,” says Valk. “They evaluate injuries, suture lacerations, and call ambulances when needed.” They also determine if the player is healthy enough to return to play. “After the physician sutures a cut, the player is usually chomping at the bit, ready to get back on the ice,” says Valk.

### A Different Ball Game

“This is the best spectator sport in the world,” says Brent “Woody” Woodside, Head Athletic Trainer. “It’s rough, but a lot of skill is involved.” Dwight Burney, MD, concurs. “Hockey players are the best-conditioned athletes but also the most prone to injury,” he says. “At baseball games, physicians can usually sit back and relax, but at hockey games, we are always in the training room between periods and almost always tending to injuries such as lacerations from skates and sticks as well as bruises and contusions from collisions.” Strains, ligament tears, shoulder dislocations, and broken collarbones, as well as wrist and hand injuries, are also common.

New Mexico Orthopaedics’ physicians and the Scorpions have woven strong bonds. Woodside carries the physicians’ cell phone and office numbers with him. “Sometimes, I need to pick their brains for information or need to have an athlete checked out after we return from a road trip,” he says.

Woodside adds that a physician’s opinion is imperative. “It’s good to have someone else back up my decision of whether a player can return to the ice.” The injuries are sometimes serious. “We’ve had a couple of scares,” he says. A visiting player once fell head first into the goal post. “He was bleeding from the head, and the physician had to immobilize the c-spine [cervical spine]. When a player is unconscious, the physician can determine whether there is a head or neck injury.”

## Just What the Doctor Ordered

Dr. Burney says that the physicians enjoy their camaraderie with the team's players. "After the season was over, we invited them to our office for their exit physicals and had lunch together," he says. He offers some advice to budding hockey players: "Stretching and flexibility are extremely important, as is wearing mandated protective gear. That is something we all can do to minimize the possibility of injuries."



The team will take a hiatus this year while a new stadium is built in Rio Rancho. "It's a world-class facility with 6,500 seats," says Valk, who adds that the venue will also host concerts, football, and other community activities.

But when the puck is in play and the sticks are once again in full swing, the team will depend on the physicians cheering on the sidelines and sewing lacerations in the back. Valk sums up, "These physicians take life-saving measures and get the skaters back on the ice to score that winning goal."