CHANGE TO POSITION STATEMENT:
THE PLACE OF MESENCHYMAL STEM/STROMAL CELL THERAPIES IN SPORT AND EXERCISE MEDICINE

Dear Members,

The Board of the Australasian College of Sport and Exercise Physicians has recently learnt of concerns of the Australian Government, other Medical Colleges and our own fellowship regarding the safety of procedures involved with the provision of stem cell therapy to patients. These concerns are partially driven by reports recently published in the lay media, scientific literature and a coroners report.


Closer to home, a recent Coroners report into the death of a patient from a complication of liposuction performed to procure mesenchymal stem cells for the treatment of Alzheimer’s disease was quite damning in the use of stem cells for conditions where there was no good clinical evidence and safety concerns.

“While all medical and surgical procedures necessarily start off experimentally, there is a world of difference between rigorously and ethically conducted clinical trials that are reviewed at every stage by qualified peers and this procedure which, in relation to the treatment of dementia at least, has some of the troubling hallmarks of “quack” medicine: desperate patients, pseudo-science and large amounts of money being charged for unproven therapies”. http://www.coroners.justice.nsw.gov.au/Documents/Findings%20Drysdale.pdf

The Board is also aware of recent actions taken by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) in relation to false and misleading claims by health practitioners where the evidence base for offered treatments is minimal. AHPRA and the Medical Board of Australia (MBA) make clear, in the MBA “Good Medical Practice: A Code of Conduct for doctors in Australia” the obligations of doctors to only make justifiable claims in relation to the efficacy, quality, safety and outcomes of offered treatments.

The 2015 ACSP Position Statement - the place of mesenchymal stem / stromal cell therapies in sport and exercise medicine concluded that use of such therapies by Sport and Exercise Physicians must fit within either of the following pathways:

1. As part of a rigorous clinical research trial;
2. As an individualised innovative therapy where there is a commitment to the transparent collection of data for analysis by a research body external to the clinic.

The Board recognises that the above concerns have occurred in applications outside rigorous clinical trials, not involved in the treatment of musculoskeletal disorders. The Board is concerned that such treatments are being administered as an innovative therapy. Whilst the Board encourages careful use of innovative therapy in the spirit of advancing medical treatments, the Board has specific concerns about patient safety with the innovative use of mesenchymal stem cells in the practices of Sport and Exercise Physicians.

As such, the Board has modified the College Stem Cell Therapies position statement to restrict use of Mesenchymal Stem Cells to rigorous clinical research trials only.

A copy of the 2015 Position Statement is attached. Removal of the innovative therapy pathway for stem cell therapy is the only change to the position.
The removal of innovative therapy pathway for mesenchymal stem cells is temporary until peer reviewed literature confirms safety and efficacy of the therapy.

The Board also recommends that all Fellows currently involved in stem cell research trials review their current research with their Ethics Committees to ensure their protocols adhere to appropriate ethical guidelines.

We trust that you will support the Board, and indeed the College, in ensuring patient safety is paramount in all that we do. We look forward to robust peer reviewed clinical evidence regarding the use of Mesenchymal Stem Cell therapies in Sport and Exercise Medicine.

THE BOARD OF THE AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SPORT AND EXERCISE PHYSICIANS