

Laura Bennion MD CCFP DipSportMed

Dr Laura Bennion sits on a bench in the senior women's dressing room. She's been with this hockey team for years. This year, she's coach—she broke her scaphoid cycling in the off-season and can't play. She's under doctor's care.

Can't play: Last year a teammate suffered a big collision, seemed woozy. The teammate complained of headaches at subsequent practices and games. Dr Bennion expressed concern, suggested the player see her family doctor and get advice. The player continued to play, avoiding high-traffic and contested areas on the ice. She closed down, refusing to talk to Dr Bennion about headaches and dizziness while continuing to play—albeit at a lower level of intensity, her game suffering. What does a doctor do here? What does a teammate do?

At the end of a weeknight game, the team eager to go out and celebrate, a teammate jokes: "Let's all go out and not care because doc will write us all a note for work tomorrow." Well, it would be nice. Wishful thinking. A few minutes before the plan to go out was hatched, a lesbian teammate asked doc about how she might conceive. The woman wanted to know whom to talk to, how to find a sperm donor. Dr Bennion was happy to be asked and trusted with the request for help. The woman is now on maternity leave from work and team, having had her baby. She'll be back.

Dr Bennion is a sports medicine doctor. She works for Team Alberta in the Canadian Women's Hockey League and she also is team physician for the under-20 women's national team. She plays hockey, doctors hockey players, and is a proud hockey mom. Her son, Evan, plays on the Westwood Senior Timbits in a league that stresses skills development. Evan was on skates for the first time at age 4 and started playing organized hockey at age 5. He loves Sidney Crosby. He loves his mom. Dr Bennion's 3-year-old daughter may be a hockey player someday too.

Hockey is a fast sport. Because of its speed, hockey has a concussion problem. Dr Bennion was part of a panel discussion this year held in February 2013 at the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame. The discussion is part of an initiative to minimize concussion risk in sport. Dr Bennion hopes to become more involved in this cause by using her voice as a sports medicine doctor, family medicine doctor, player, and mother in advocating for evidence-based decisions concerning the age appropriateness of body contact in minor hockey.

In the stands at rinks she sees young players of different masses, big players looking to knock other players over and small players hoping quickness will allow them to evade big guys. Small players can hit and big players can be quick but the bad end result of a big player crushing a little one at an age when range in mass is greatest suggests to Dr Bennion that there might be a health-based solution to protect the brains of Canadian children as they play in our church of hockey. What does a doctor, a doc, a teammate, and mom do? They get involved. 🍁

Dr Bennion is pictured with her practice partner, **Dr Kathy Reynolds**. Dr Bennion found that her interests in low-risk obstetrics and sports medicine were not sustainable in conjunction with a busy family practice. She did not want to give up family medicine, so she advertised for a partner and quickly found one in Dr Reynolds, who also works in pediatric oncology long-term follow-up, with a sexual assault response team, and in a family planning clinic. By sharing the family medicine duties, they are able to work in their niche areas while also continuing in primary care. This collaborative model has allowed them to maintain meaningful continuity of care for their patients and has become a valuable professional partnership.

Cover photo: Curtis Comeau, Edmonton, Alta

Story: Shane Neilson MD CCFP, Erin, Ont

Additional photos and the French translation of the story appear on page 798.

D'autres photos et la traduction en français du récit se trouvent à la page 798.