COVID-19 and sports medicine research

The coronavirus pandemic has created an immediate need for research that can solve both the treatment and prevention of the COVID-19 disease. Thus, it is reasonable and justified that funding opportunities in several countries for "corona research" has risen dramatically and that large grants have been given to research groups after just a few days of scientific evaluation by funding agencies. In some countries (eg, Denmark), the amount of research money made immediately available by public and private funding sources for corona research nearly matches the annual funding from the government for the entire field of health research. The substantial funding of coronavirus research is good and relevant, and has in the middle of the tragic international crisis due to the disease demonstrated how vital research is for society. In the present corona situation, this is highly visible thought the immediate desperate need for treatment options and the development of a vaccine toward COVID-19.

A similar scenario is unlikely to happen in the area of sports medicine, although the societal impact of musculoskeletal injuries on the individuals' occupational work capacity and impact of lifestyle-related diseases due to physical inactivity is monumental. The negative impact of physical inactivity and effect of tissue injury occurring during sports occur either slowly or are not immediately life-threatening. Thus, sports medicine shares the destiny with many other research fields where it is a daily struggle to convince governments and private foundations about the relevance and need for continuous research and its funding.

An interesting aspect of the coronavirus pandemic is the enormous amount of information on development, diagnosis, and treatment of the disease that is circulating. Some of the information is “fake news” and does sometimes lead to misconceptions and practices that will not improve the handling of the situation. Without any direct similarity, the situation in the clinical sports medicine often is that desperation of the athletes or sports-active person in relation to handling and treating a sports injury leads to adopting undocumented treatment methods or preventive measures. The use of scientifically undocumented treatments in the world of sports medicine is common, and calls for more research that can separate scientific truth from “fake news.” The current coronavirus situation could develop into an advantage for researchers also in many other fields—if the acceptance and appreciation of scientific findings of the general public expands. This would then entail an increased overall responsibility of both researchers and scientific journals (like ours) to be sound and promote solid scientific finding.

The corona pandemia has shown us how important science is when we are faced with the unexpected. Developing new science from “scratch” in a situation that requires information immediately is not possible, and thus, it is important at all times to have a kind of “scientific readiness” that requires a constant support of scientific activities, such as with corona research as well as in the field of sports medicine research. On a political level, it can be tempting to cut down grant support for research areas because it is not always easy to obtain the immediate impact that research has either on changing clinical treatments (often takes 10-15 years to develop) or developing commercial products. Thus, it is a common investment in research on a variety of disorders and diseases in order to have the “scientific readiness” that is needed also in sports medicine, to respond to the societal questions that come up in relation to our inactive lifestyle and the social-economic burden of injuries developing in recreational and competitive sports.

The unfortunate occurrence of the coronavirus pandemia has among many things reminded us how important research within all scientific disciplines is. The ongoing continuous research effort worldwide within sports medicine is important in order to develop results that can be translated into optimal handling of injury development, diagnosis and treatment, as well as guidelines for the best possible physical training for both healthy and chronically diseased individuals in order to maintain lifelong everyday function and a long and disease-free life. It is the role of scientific journals (such as Translational Sports Medicine) to provide research findings that will advance the overall knowledge within the scientific area of Sports Medicine.

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