



March 2010

Dear Parents

I write to you at the end of this first and most busy term. I have kept in contact with you through the course of the term regarding the developing DigiSchool and you have no doubt kept abreast of the general results of the past few months via The Heron. I am not then going to repeat here what has already been disseminated to you. I shall update you on a few matters and then share with you some important information we have been speaking about to our young sportsmen.

STAFFING

I am pleased to announce to you that Mr Frederick Romijn has been appointed to fill the vacant Co-curricular Co-ordinator post. He will work alongside Miss Jelley but, whereas she focuses on administration, he will have development as his main aim. Mr Romijn is an experienced teacher and a coach of some standing in various sports, including the coaching of senior provincial teams. We look forward to him joining us in April and trust he will be fulfilled at HeronBridge.

Mrs Pauline Andre returned to teach with us this past month. We are grateful to her for filling in as she has done when we were short of a teacher and thank her for doing so.

TALKING PARENTING

The staff enjoyed a most significant Talking Teaching conference recently. It was addressed in part by Mr Pieter de Villiers, who presented a most insightful and challenging assessment of current societal trends. The good news is that we have secured him for Talking Parenting. Never mind being worthwhile hearing, he must be heard! The details of the two evenings (6th and 13th May) have been advertised. I can only encourage parents in the strongest possible way to attend. Bookings will be taken early next term.

ACADEMIC REPORTS ON MOODLE

Please note that the academic reports are issued today in two forms. Pupils will be issued with printed reports as usual and the reports will be available under each pupil's login in on <http://moodle.heronbridge.co.za>

PARENT EVENINGS'

A separate email communication invites parents to make bookings to speak to teachers on the evenings of 29 April and 4 May. All parents should respond, to take advantage of the opportunities of speaking to their children's teachers face to face. Bookings may be made via return email or online at www.heronbridgecollege.co.za, after 12 April.

SOCIAL ILLS

We are concerned about protecting our pupils from some of the abusive elements in our society. We shall be addressing specifically the matter of teenage drinking in the future. I have had discussions recently with coaches, counsellors and gym instructors about the increasing use of steroids by teens.

There is much to be concerned about. We decided to address the issue directly with our boys because, as young sportsmen and gym enthusiasts, they constitute a vulnerable group. Our College Counsellor, Mr Douglas Andrews, developed some suitable material and ran a number of sessions informing our pupils of what to be aware of. The subject is of such importance, I wanted parents themselves to be briefed and so I copy to you here Mr Andrews' information.

ANABOLIC ANDROGENIC STEROIDS - By Mr D Andrews

What are steroids?

Steroids are usually synthetic chemicals that mimic the male hormone testosterone. Taking steroids will increase protein synthesis in muscle cells and this ultimately leads to the development of more cellular muscle tissue. Steroids also increase the production of blood cells in the bone marrow which allows for more oxygen to be transported to cells, which leads to increased cellular metabolism.

A historical background on steroids

Anabolic steroids have been used and abused for well over seventy years. Early evidence of steroid use has been documented, and includes the use of steroids by the Nazis; the drug was trialled on inmates of concentration camps to later be used on fighting troops to increase stamina and aggression. Hitler used steroids to increase his well being. During the Vietnam War evidence points to steroid abuse by the US Military as a way of improving aggression in troops and body strength to cope with heavy pack loads for long missions.

As the sport of bodybuilding became popular in the sixties and seventies, the development of steroids became more sophisticated and the usage became frequent within the bodybuilding community. Today steroid usage is totally rife in gyms, where power-lifters, bodybuilders, nightclub bouncers and sport cheats all take advantage of these chemicals as a way of advancing and enhancing their careers. There are dedicated web sites that promote and advocate the use of steroids, and they describe the details of a vast array of varieties of chemicals and administering techniques.

Legitimate medical use

Steroids have been used by doctors since the 1930's to treat a number of medical conditions. These include anaemia, growth failure, appetite disorders and the stimulation of puberty in distressed teenagers. There has been success in steroid use in sex change procedures and as a male contraceptive, as steroids play havoc with sperm count and testicular development. However the side effects negate the distribution of steroids as an over-the-counter oral chemical contraceptive. If a doctor prescribes steroids and they are bought on prescription at a chemist they are a regulated drug and are designed for a specific use.

That is the reason I refer to users of steroids as abusers. Any regulated drug that is not used for medical reasons and is not legally prescribed by a registered doctor is a drug that is been illegally abused by the user.

There is not just one variety of anabolic steroid, there are many varieties. Where some target specific medical problems, others are designed for intense use or are for general use. Any medication used for the wrong reason is dangerous.

The South African situation

In South Africa, the trade and distribution of steroids is illegal. As a result steroids are usually manufactured in 'back street' chemical laboratories and the raw chemicals are shipped in on the black market by the very same people who smuggle in Heroin and Cocaine. Consequently, a regular steroid abuser never knows from batch to batch what the quality or make up of the drug is.

Many drug dealers as we know 'cut' the pure and expensive product with other cheap chemicals to increase the amount of their products. Studies have been done on confiscated steroid batches and they found that even in single batches the chemical composition of the drugs differed vastly. There is also a large amount of synthetically created steroids on the black market that originated for use in animals; steroids are often used illegally in the horse racing industry.

Side effects of steroid abuse result because steroids replace or interfere with the natural growth hormone cycles in the body. From a biological perspective the body always tries to maintain a balance amongst all chemicals and systems, this is called homeostasis. If we interfere with this process we often put strain on organs, or allow systems to become unbalanced. As a result organ damage can happen, and short term, chronic and terminal conditions can often eventuate.

According to South African Law it is illegal to be in possession, trade or self-administer any form of banned substance. Possession of even trace elements of anabolic components can result in prosecution and incarceration, with a resultant criminal record.

Body damage

All people who abuse steroids will experience some of the following negative side effects to a greater or lesser degree:

- *Acne: due to blocked sebaceous glands and overproduction of skin oils.*
- *Aggression: interference with other hormones involved in brain regulation, including epinephrine, serotonin and dopamine.*
- *Cholesterol in the blood: increases bad fats and decreases good fats; coronary risk.*
- *Enlarged heart: left atrium enlargement; irreversible damage could lead to weakening of the heart and death.*
- *Depression: interference with neurotransmitters can lead to permanent depression, sometimes accompanied by suicide especially when dreams don't meet with reality.*
- *Gynecomastia: development of breast tissue in males as a result of hormone imbalance.*
- *Hypertension: high blood pressure and the damage of constant adrenalin in the system.*
- *Liver and kidney damage: metabolism of chemicals and removal of excess wastes put pressure on the organs; sometimes the damage is irreversible resulting in dialysis or transplant operations as the only way to avoid death. Cancer tumours in these organs have been linked to steroid abuse.*
- *Baldness: as a result of hormone interference, irreversible.*
- *Prostate enlargement, linked to cancer.*
- *Stunted growth in teenagers as a result of calcification of growth plates, normal male growth stops between 19 and 22.*
- *Testicular atrophy: damage and shrinking of the testicles, can cause sterility and future problems with testosterone production.*
- *Headaches: chronic and debilitating, can become frequent and constant in people who never suffered from headaches.*
- *Heightened anxiety and interference with sleep patterns.*
- *Personality change: irritability and decreased social skills, lowering of EQ (emotional intelligence).*

The bubble bursts

Unless you are a pro-bodybuilder or a sports cheat, the benefits to the average person are negligible in the long run. The effects will reverse once you stop as your body will revert to its genetic code. However, any physiological damage may be permanent. A large percentage of retired steroid abusers wind up having coronary bi-pass operations later in life. If you need the effects of steroids in the first place to boost your self-esteem or physical stature for psychological reasons, the hype and sales pitch you fall victim to will never be the reality of your situation.

You will wind up disillusioned and depressed. And you make criminals rich. The dealers in steroids make themselves out to be supposed world authorities on the use of steroids, often claiming to have irrefutable medical backing and years of experience. Mostly, they know just how to get your trust

What about over-the-counter sports supplements?

Generally these products that you might buy off the shelves at your local chemist are quite safe, but remember they are not sweets and abuse is common especially if you don't see the desired results. In this case they can then be extremely dangerous. Beware of gym stores as they might have unregulated products packaged to look authentic, and you wind up putting something dangerous into your system.

The problem comes when you start to buy various different types of supplements at the same time. You end up following the dosages on each product as instructed, but you find yourself overdosing on chemicals that are common in some products. This can put tremendous strain on your kidneys, which could lead to permanent damage. Even overdosing on vitamin C is not a good idea and can give you headaches.

Some store-bought gym products are designed to help you metabolise food faster, give you lasting energy to train or burn off excess fat. Beware of these products; they often contain ephedrine which will speed up your heart rate and raise your blood pressure. This puts strain on your heart and will interfere with concentration when it comes to tasks like studying for exams or effective time management planning.

Fewer professional sportsmen and women are using Creatine than they did in the 90's as some research is pointing to possible side effects associated with lower leg injuries and kidney damage.

A proper well-designed diet will provide you with all the benefits of supplements. Most of the chemicals you take into your bodies are not needed, and are not stored, so your body will just remove them via the urine.

Basically you end up flushing your money down the toilet.

Douglas Andrews

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Mr Andrews sounds a serious warning. We have wanted to instruct our pupils in this regard so that they are well informed. However, it is more important to warn them of the dangers. I appeal to parents for support in this regard and we make ourselves available for advice. One point still to be made is the severity with which provincial and national sports organisations will respond to steroid usage.

EASTER

Easter is upon us this week. This is a time to celebrate some of the core truths of the Christian faith. We wish all families a blessed Easter. A warm invitation is extended here to join in with HeronBridge Community Church for services at 09:00 on both Good Friday (2 April) and Easter Sunday (4 April). My personal musings, as I've considered the significance of the season, have been around the portentous facts of Jesus being given and risen. Only the love of God makes such truths possible, firstly, and real to us, secondly. May we all celebrate Easter meaningfully.

I wish all families an enjoyable school holiday, trusting particularly for safety for all when travelling.

Kind regards



David Klein
College Head