



Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) for Sports Medicine Professionals: Blended Learning Program

Powered by Sports Medicine Concepts

Course Overview

In the high-pressure world of athletics, the difference between a managed crisis and a career-ending trauma often comes down to the first few minutes of response. While sports medicine has mastered physical trauma, the "invisible injuries"—mental health crises and substance use disorders—require a specialized tactical approach.

In partnership with the **National Council for Mental Wellbeing**, Sports Medicine Concepts has developed a much needed educational opportunity for sports medicine professionals and athletic staff. **Mental Health First Aid for the Sports Medicine Professionals** combines knowledge and comprehension with true-to-life simulation to create a program that demonstrates real-life application of foundational mental health crisis intervention tactics in the unique and demanding sports medicine environment.

This 8-hour certification program is delivered as 2 hours of self-paced pre-work followed by two (3 hour) instructor-led online sessions. This program will equip sports medicine clinicians and athletic staff with the tools to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental health crises.

The goal of this program is to ensure that when a mental health emergency occurs, participants are as prepared to respond to a mental health crisis as they are to a physical cardiac or orthopedic emergency by helping participants:

- Recognize early warning signs of mental illness and substance use in athletes.
- Execute the 5-step ALGEE plan to de-escalate crises and connect individuals to care.
- Foster a culture of support where seeking help is normalized.
- Implement self-care protocols to ensure your own mental health after a critical incident.

Dual Certification

Upon successful completion of the program, participants will receive a dual-certificate that recognizes both foundational expertise and specialized sports-specific application:

3-Year MHFA Certification

A nationally recognized certification through the National Council for Mental Wellbeing.

SMC Sports Mental Health Certificate

Practical Application

A specialized certificate documenting emphasis on practical application of mental health crisis intervention tactics and self-post care needs of the sports medicine clinician and athletic staff through the use of simulation designed to enhance:

- **Visualization Training:** See exactly what application of mental health intervention looks like in the setting of an athlete suffering various levels of mental health crises.
- **Tactical Execution:** Observe and debrief enactments of ALGEE strategies during true-to-life recorded simulation.
- **Mental Rehearsal:** Visual imagery of oneself performing critical mental health intervention skills to engage neural pathways to facilitate skill acquisition.

Self-Post Care Needs

This curriculum addresses an often overlooked component of mental health crisis training that is critical to the sports medicine provider, the self-care of the medical providers. Managing a single critically injured athlete or a severe mental health crisis is a traumatic event for the clinician. But so too is management of many less traumatic events over time. Our curriculum places a heavy emphasis on Self-Post Care Needs, providing participants with:

- Strategies to mitigate secondary traumatic stress.
- Structured debriefing models for sports medicine teams.
- Long-term wellness tools to ensure career longevity and mental resilience.

Course Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this program, the participant will be able to:

1. Knowledge & Comprehension (Foundational)

- Identify the common signs and symptoms of mental health challenges (including anxiety, depression, and psychosis) and substance use disorders prevalent in the athletic population.
- Describe the five steps of the ALGEE Action Plan as defined by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing.
- Recognize the unique cultural barriers and stigmas within sports medicine that delay or prevent athletes from seeking mental health support.

2. Application & Analysis (Clinical Practice)

- Apply the ALGEE Action Plan to a simulated mental health crisis (e.g., a sideline panic attack or a locker room disclosure of self-harm) to provide initial support.
- Differentiate between a primary physical injury and a secondary psychological crisis during high-stakes athletic events.
- Utilize non-judgmental communication techniques to de-escalate a distressed individual and bridge them to professional psychiatric or psychological care.

3. Synthesis & Evaluation (Practical Application)

- Develop a post-incident Self-Care Protocol to mitigate the effects of secondary traumatic stress and compassion fatigue following a critical athletic injury.
- Execute a structured "Hot Debrief" model within a sports medicine team to process the emotional and clinical impact of a catastrophic medical event.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of a mental health intervention using true-to-life simulation, identifying areas for improvement in clinical communication and resource referral.

Course Outline

Phase 1: Self-Paced Knowledge Prep (2 Hours)

Completed online via the MHFA portal 48 hours prior to the instructor-led session.

- **Unit 1: Introduction to Mental Health First Aid:** Defining the scope of a First Aider; identifying the impact of mental health challenges on the general and athletic populations.
- **Unit 2: Overview of Mental Health in Sports:** Prevalence of anxiety, depression, and substance use in the general and athletic populations.
- **Unit 3: The ALGEE Action Plan:** Introduction to the 5-step intervention model.
- **Unit 4: Culture & Stigma:** Identifying barriers to care within the "tough it out" culture of sports.
- **Unit 5: Common Disorders:** Recognizing the signs and symptoms of Anxiety, Depression, and Substance Use Disorders.

Phase 2: Instructor-Led Tactical Training (6 Hours)

Led by SMC Clinical Instructors. Focused on the application of ALGEE through simulation.

Module 1: The Foundation of ALGEE (1.5 Hours)

- **A - Assess for risk of suicide or harm:** Identifying red flags in the locker room or clinic.
- **L - Listen non-judgmentally:** Mastering the "Active Listening" techniques specific to high-pressure environments.
- **G - Give reassurance and information:** How to provide support without over-promising or diagnosing.
- **E - Encourage appropriate professional help:** Mapping out the referral network (Sports Psychologists, Team Physicians, etc.).
- **E - Encourage self-help and other support strategies:** Building a support system for the athlete.

Module 2: True-to-Life Simulations – The Crisis Environment (2 Hours)

SMC-exclusive simulations designed to replicate the visual and emotional weight of real-world emergencies. These simulations are video driven followed by an instructor-led tactical debrief providing immediate instructor feedback on communication, body language, and execution of the ALGEE steps.

- **Scenario 1: The Sideline Panic Attack.** Distinguishing between physiological distress and a mental health crisis during competition.

- **Scenario 2: The Substance Use Red Flag.** Managing a conversation with an athlete showing signs of opioid or alcohol misuse.
- **Scenario 3: The Withdrawn Starter**
- **Scenario 4: The Overwhelmed Freshman**
- **Scenario 5: I Can't Do it Anymore**
- **Scenario 6: The Injured Athlete Spiral**
- **Scenario 7: Direct Suicidal Ideation**
- **Scenario 8: Coworker in Crisis**

Module 3: Post-Traumatic Management & Provider Care (1.5 Hours)

SMC Enhanced Content: Protecting the longevity of the Sports Medicine Professional.

- **The "Second Victim" Phenomenon:** Understanding the psychological impact on providers after managing a catastrophic injury or psychiatric emergency.
- **Structured Debriefing:** Implementing the "Hot Debrief" vs. "Cold Debrief" models for sports med teams.
- **Resilience Planning:** Developing a personal "Self-Post Care" protocol to mitigate burnout and Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS).

Module 4: Certification & Integration (1 Hour)

- **Final Knowledge Check:** Review of the MHFA evidence-based standards.
- **Policy Integration:** How to incorporate MHFA protocols into your existing Emergency Action Plan (EAP).
- **Conclusion:** Course wrap-up and issuance of 3-year MHFA Certification and SMC Certificate of Completion.