

FIFA football nurse – A task sharing approach in sports and exercise medicine practice in grassroots women’s football in low- and middle- income settings. A study protocol for a cluster randomised controlled trial

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Abstract

Football (soccer) is a very popular team sport among African women and girls, with player numbers continuing to rise at all levels of the sport. Whereas the participation in football and associated injuries are on the rise, there are not enough sports and exercise medicine (SEM) personnel to attend to these women football players. While Africa may not currently have enough SEM trained medical doctors and/or physiotherapists, it has relatively higher numbers of other healthcare workers; for example, nurses, who lead healthcare services provision from community to tertiary levels. The primary objective of this study will be to compare sports medicine practices; injury prevention behaviours; injury risk parameters; incidence and prevalence of injuries and illnesses in teams with and without a Football Nurse during one competitive season in Malawi’s Women’s football league. This study will be a cluster randomised control trial will recruit 24 teams from the Women’s Football League in Malawi, which will be randomised to either the intervention group or the control group. A cohort of 12 nurses will receive training in basic football medicine; after which they will be attached to a total of 12 women’s football teams (intervention group) during one competitive season. The Football Nurses will be directly report to a physiotherapist or doctor in their district to whom they will refer serious injuries for investigations, or further management. The teams with Football Nurses will be compared to other teams that will not have Football Nurses. We expect to develop a low cost, sustainable and context relevant solution to man- age the treatment gap of football injuries/illnesses in underserved communities such as women’s football.