Personal Health: News and Notes

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Accurate feedback is better for students than bogus praise
In another blow to the self-esteem movement, a University of Pennsylvania researcher has found that students are less likely to be depressed if they have accurate views of their performance and get accurate feedback about it.

Lead researcher Young-Hoon Kim, a postdoctoral researcher at Penn, worked with Chi-yue Chiu at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, to evaluate the responses of 295 college students in the United States and 2,780 high school students in Hong Kong. They gave the students tests, asked them how they thought they did and compared that to their actual performance, gave them bogus results that were either too high or too low, and asked about depression.

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Contrary to the strong American belief that people thrive on praise, Kim found that the happiest students in both countries were the ones who knew how good or bad they were and were told the truth.

"It's much better to be honest and give accurate feedback," said Kim, whose work was in the October issue of the American Psychological Association Journal Emotion.

While accurate appraisals don't guarantee improved performance, he said, inaccurate feedback undermines motivation to achieve. Because people often take negative feedback personally - especially in a culture where it's so rare - the trick is to be "really cautious in delivering it. Teachers, parents, or employers should emphasize that 'this is not about you. You didn't do well on this task . . . You have to practice more. You have to study more.'"

Stacey Burling

Children's Hospital confirms increase in knee injuries
For years, sports medicine professionals have been reporting an apparent rise in two kinds of knee injuries in children and adolescents: tears in the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) and meniscus.

A new analysis suggests that at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, at least, the increase is real.

From January 1999 to January 2011, the number of ACL tears treated at Children's rose more than 11 percent a year, while meniscus tears increased nearly 14 percent per year.

Researchers compared these figures with the number of tibial spine fractures to make sure the increase in knee injuries was not simply the result of the hospital's getting more referrals overall. The number of spine fractures rose just 1 percent each year, suggesting that the knee injuries are truly on the rise.

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