NCAA retains national provider for sickle cell trait screening exams

A new agreement with Quest Diagnostics' national laboratories will give NCAA member institutions and their student-athletes access to affordable screening exams for sickle cell trait.

Quest, one of the nation's largest networks of laboratories, will provide screenings either on campus during student-athletes' mandatory medical examinations, or through its 2,000 patient-service centers.

The program will relieve schools of the need to negotiate test fees with local labs and return test results to student-athletes and clear them for competition more quickly. It will also reduce the cost of those tests, which has been cited as a problematic factor in screening athletes for the trait.

The agreement will help NCAA member institutions meet requirements to have all incoming student athletes tested for sickle cell trait before their initial season of eligibility. The test became mandatory among NCAA Division I schools in 2010, and similar legislation is being considered among Division II and III schools because of increasing concern toward potential health hazards attributed to the trait.

Sickle cell trait, which affects about 8 percent of African Americans and a small percentage of Hispanics and whites, causes red blood cells to warp into stiff and sticky crescent shapes which can clog blood vessels and reduce oxygen to muscles and organs. In rare cases, the condition has been blamed for the sudden collapses and deaths of high-level athletes.

Supporters of the NCAA's mandatory testing policy believe the awareness of an athlete's condition can prevent health emergencies.

But the cost of the test can vary among different laboratories and geographic regions, and the expense may not covered by families or student-athletes' insurance policies. The Quest agreement will help reduce that cost and provide education to assist student-athletes' medical care, including counseling for health, athletics and family planning concerns.

NCAA institutions can select from the following three service models:

1. Institution On-Site Services Model.
2. Patient Service Center Model.
3. Student-Athlete Service Model.

Institution can contact the Quest Diagnostics Client Service Team for more information on these three programs at **1-866-226-8046**.