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Philip O'Connor, Reuters

## Doping now considered a public health concern

The use of performance-enhancing drugs is now a public health matter rather than simply a sporting problem, delegates said at a top anti-doping conference.

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PROFESSOR  
ARNE LJUNGQVIST  
ANTI-DOPING FOUNDATION

"If we believe that around three per cent of high-school boys in the US are taking a steroid or growth hormone, then that's a public health issue," said Timothy Armstrong of the World Health Organization (WHO).

"Substance abuse in any shape or form has a physical and mental health aspect to it. The WHO, being the lead UN agency on health matters, takes this issue quite seriously."



Armstrong was speaking at the conference organised by the Arne Ljungqvist Foundation, named after the Swedish anti-doping official who is also chairman of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) medical commission.

Ljungqvist, who invited the likes of the WHO and World-Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) to the meeting, shared Armstrong's opinion.

"This is a first attempt to highlight this matter as a public health issue, which in my view it is," he said at a press briefing.

"Elite sport plays an obvious role. They are the role models of youngsters and if they are drug takers, that is not the right role model for the coming society.

"I am so happy today to see these international authorities coming together and sharing these concerns that are being expressed and I hope that we can find common ways to deal with them," he added.



WADA director general David Howman told the briefing that what happens in elite sport has an effect on wider society and that the sharing of information was crucial to tackling the problem of doping.

"What we have learned in the last 10 years is that there is a trickle-down effect into recreational sports and into the high schools," said Howman, adding that health and law enforcement authorities had their part to play.

“In Australia now, the customs people share their information with the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Agency (ASADA), and already 40 per cent of their anti-doping rule violations come from that sort of information.



“That’s a very good example of how it can work when people work together.”

Howman said a similar effort prior to July and August’s London Olympics had led to “several cases” of doping being discovered.

“The UK Anti-Doping Agency had a similar arrangement with customs and police and they were able to give information to the IOC. The anti-doping programme that was run during the Games was based on that intelligence.

“My understanding is that it led to several cases that were discovered in the out-of-competition phase.”



Armstrong agreed that such cooperation was essential for dealing with doping, adding that more data was needed to assess the scale of the problem.

“Each of our organisations has a piece of the pie and can only work in the areas where we have a mandate to work. But we can join with our sister agencies such as UNESCO and other potential partners such as WADA and the IOC.

“We all require better data to inform prevalence – how many people are taking what substances and the adverse social and health effects as a consequence of that.”