Scripps

11th Annual

BRAIN INJURY REHABILITATION CONFERENCE MARCH 11-12, 2016

Liberty Station Conference Center, San Diego, California

KEYNOTE PRESENTATION

Bennet Omalu, MD, MBA, MPH

Don't Break the Rules, Change the Game: *How Bennet Omalu Single-handedly Changed American Football, Professional Sports, and How the World Perceives Traumatic Brain Injuries*

As chronicled in the upcoming film Concussion (starring Will Smith), Dr. Bennet Omalu's story is one of great triumph in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. Born in 1968 in Eastern Nigeria during the civil war, his family lived as refugees, his town under constant fire by the Nigerian Air Force. Despite suffering war-related under-nutrition in the first two years of his life, Omalu would go on to attend medical school at age 15 and become a physician by age 21.

In 2002, Dr. Omalu made a career breakthrough when he became the first doctor to discover and identify chronic brain damage as a major factor in the deaths of some professional athletes. He called the disease Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE), which he first discovered as the result of an autopsy he performed on Mike Webster—one of the best Centers in NFL history. "Iron Mike", the legendary Pittsburgh Steeler and Hall of Famer, died at age 50, his brain revealing something doctors had never seen before. Within five years of reporting on Webster's case, Dr. Omalu went on to identify CTE in eight more deceased NFL players. He was also the first to discover CTE in military veterans diagnosed with PTSD, as well as professional wrestlers. But his findings were summarily dismissed—and even ridiculed—by his professional peers, the NFL, and the sports industry.

The NFL even made a concerted effort to retract Dr. Omalu's published papers. But he stood his ground in search of the truth. Today, CTE has become generally accepted and Dr. Omalu's findings have revolutionized neuroscience, sports medicine and safety, the study of all types of brain trauma, and the entire sports industry.