Elbow Dislocation

Elbow dislocations are not common. The typical mechanism of injury is a fall onto an outstretched arm. The elbow is a high functioning joint that has both bending motions and rotation occurring during movement. The significant force causes the elbow to rotate right out of the joint. There are two types of dislocations. A partial dislocation, also known as a subluxation, the joint is only partially separated and relocates on its own. A complete dislocation is when the joint is completely separated and does not return to normal position.

Symptoms:

Complete dislocation

- obvious deformity
- extreme pain
- no range of motion

Partial dislocation

- pain
- sensation of shifting in the joint
- sensations of tingling or numbness that diminishes or resolves
- increased pain with range of motion
- bruising if any of the supporting structures were damaged

How is it diagnosed?

The elbow specialist will evaluate for any deformity, circulation to the hand, and range of motion. Further testing of the ligamentous structures will be done. X-rays will be taken to check for any injuries to the bone or determine the direction of the dislocation.
Treatment

It is important to note that if there is an obvious deformity the patient should be transported to an emergency room immediately. If the elbow is still dislocated, the elbow specialist will reduce the elbow to avoid further neurologic or circulatory damage. The patient will then utilize a hinge brace to help with stabilization and follow a formal physical therapy program to help strengthen the supporting structures and regain range of motion.