The wave of concussions sweeping the NHL has forced fantasy owners into the role of a diagnostician.

In discussing 37-year-old Chris Pronger's future a few days ago when asked if his captain and star defenceman's concussion was career-ending, Philadelphia Flyers GM Paul Holmgren neatly summed up the maddeningly frustrating scenarios facing NHL teams, players, doctors and fantasy owners alike:

"One of our doctors said to me that concussions are like fingerprints. None of them are the same."

Ugh.

Pronger has been ruled out for the rest of the regular season and playoffs. He may or may not ever be able to play again, but even his wife said this past week that at this point they're just praying he can have a few good days strung together in a row.

In the case of Pronger or someone like Boston Bruins centre Marc Savard, who has been forced to sit out this entire season and will seemingly never lace them up competitively again, it's almost not about playing hockey... it's about quality of life. Savard said Saturday that it's tough to see a bright future

and he's still dealing with headaches and memory loss. Of small consolation, one supposes, is that the depression with which he had been dealing is not currently an issue.

Pittsburgh Penguins pivot Sidney Crosby, the face of the league in many respects, has been the highest-profile concussion case. He returned from a lengthy absence on November 21, but played only eight games before being forced out of the lineup again with no return date in sight.

Claude Giroux, the budding superstar for the Philadelphia Flyers who more fans league-wide got to know through the masterpiece that was HBO's 24/7, only sat out four affairs after being accidentally knocked in the head by teammate Wayne Simmonds with Giroux down on the ice.

Carolina Hurricanes sophomore forward Jeff Skinner missed 16 games after getting caught by Andy Sutton in the trolley tracks. A completely legal hit from a player with a history of highly-questionable hits, but still with damaging results. When Skinner was rocked by Brooks Orpik in the youngster's second game back, fans held their collective breath. Despite being slow to get up, he was apparently fine.

Washington Capitals centre Nicklas Backstrom was carelessly elbowed in the head by now-Montreal Canadiens winger Rene Bourque – a play for which Bourque was suspended five games – and hasn't yet played. Backstrom had been having a tremendous season too.

Evander Kane. Danny Briere. Kris Letang. Marc Staal. Joni Pitkanen. Milan Michalek. Brayden Schenn. Pierre-Marc Bouchard. Peter Mueller. The list goes on. And on. And on.

PAGING DOCTOR POOLIE... PAGING DOCTOR POOLIE

So what's a fantasy owner to do?

With each concussion presenting a unique set of challenges for the individual player and the medical staff trying to gauge his recovery, we're forced into adopting a wait and see approach.

Should you decide to ride the situation out, your return on that time investment could come quickly in the form of a fairly minor absence... in which case you're still going to be so mindful of the next possible concussion. You'll be wincing along with every hit and every foray into the corners for a loose puck. Not to mention that each points slump – something which every single

player endures no matter what – will have you questioning whether the player's ability to produce has been negatively affected in a permanent way.

Should you decide to sell off your concussed player to a fellow league owner who is less squeamish about these sorts of injuries , you'll probably be taking a sizeable hit on his normal value. From that perspective, is that what's best for your team if the player qualifies for an IR slot anyway? Or should you just ride it out and hope for the best?

The fantasy coach in you will want healthy players in the line-up on any given night. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.

The GM side of you will assess the potential trade return against the long-term goal of winning that season or, in the case of a keeper league, being able to stay competitive on an annual basis.

The owner portion of your poolie persona will wonder about the benefit of your team relocating to a warmer climate in the frigid depths of winter, while also weighing the potential benefits of adding a cheer squad vs. the cost of a divorce lawyer in the inevitable separation from Mrs. Fantasy Owner.

TREAT EACH PREDICAMENT ON ITS OWN MERIT

Just like the concussions themselves though, each situation will demand different considerations from the poolie. There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ answer, unfortunately.

With Pronger, he’s obviously long-since been dropped in single-season leagues. Keeper league owners, depending on the size of the league, are basically stuck with an asset where the value went from fairly high – relative to his age – to virtually non-existent because of his age and the uncertainty surrounding whether he’ll be able to resume his NHL career at some point.

Let’s talk generalities though. The higher your concussed player’s normal worth, the less inclined you may be to have a fire sale. You don’t want to give away a hundred dollar bill for two twenties and some loose change from the couch.

Conversely – and more specifically - it’s the higher-end options like Crosby which may draw in some pretty tempting offers in keeper leagues. Most people want to get a great deal and although this latest go-round with the concussion wheel may have scared more people away, it’s Sidney Crosby we’re talking about and we saw that he’s still unquestionably a beast when

he’s able to take to the ice.

Whether or not you accept a proposal in this sort of case will come down to this: at what level of an offer will you be comfortable with letting an elite asset go?

Would you be willing to get rid of the headache of wondering when your hundred dollar guy will come back in exchange for sixty-five bucks? How about seventy?

In the case of Crosby and single-season leagues, at this point he’d likely only be worth gambling on if you’re in a head-to-head format and want to wager on him being able to produce for your playoff run. In single-season roto, unless he’s just being given away, you’d likely have to deal away too much for someone who might return too late – or not at all - to help you this season.

In the keeper league scenario, whether it’s Crosby or someone else, you’ll need to factor in how many players you’re allowed to hang onto each summer and whether the lesser-quality guys you’ll be getting back in return are actually significant enough upgrades on your current surrounding cast.

The more active of an owner you are – and specifically the more confident you are in your ability to scrounge up quality free agents on a regular basis – may also come into play. If you're checking your fantasy resources nightly (totally sounds dirtier than it's meant to be) and are dialed into current hot streak and line combinations, you may have much less apprehension about needing to find an indefinite IR replacement.

The bottom line is this: concussions are a growing problem in the fantasy world. Period. They're happening far too often for anyone's tastes.

Some have been pure, dumb bad luck. Giroux/ Simmonds and Michalek/Karlsson come to mind immediately.

Others might be attributed to a faster game with bigger players. Head shots resulting from less respect amongst players in the league, or even decent guys doing stupid things. We're all human. The factor we can't overlook either is that there is not only more awareness about the issue, but there are improved methods of diagnoses.

Now we, whether we want to deal with them or not, are almost guaranteed of having a concussed player on our poolie roster sooner or later. It forces us into making decisions on information that generally will be beyond our scope of medical expertise and that frankly, as

we've seen up close across the league, is in a field where even the leading experts can't give a definitive prognosis.

Is it frustrating? Absolutely.

And we're not even the ones having to physically deal with concussion symptoms - we just have to figure out the best course of action as it relates to our passion of fantasy hockey.

Should you be so inclined, you can follow me on Twitter .