

So you want to be ... a sport and exercise medicine physician

Have you ever dreamed of working at an Olympic games? Perhaps your passion is health promotion? Not activities you might expect to find in the same working week, but that's what you could be doing if you choose a career in sport and exercise medicine.

Sport and exercise medicine was recognized as an NHS specialty in 2005. Previously, sports physicians had been working in a variety of sporting, NHS and private settings to deliver care to 'athletes' (from Olympic champions to those unable to don their rugby boots for the local village team). Specialty recognition came about thanks to their campaigning in conjunction with the award of the 2012 Olympics and a government that recognized the epidemic of 'lifestyle' diseases along with the ability of physical activity to prevent and treat them. And that is why the speciality is so broad. The skills and experience of working with elite sportspeople has taught us a lot; not only how to manage musculoskeletal problems but also about the beneficial effects of physical activity on the body.

The training...

Entry is at ST3 from either core medical training or the acute common care stem pathway. To improve your chances of success try and gain experience by volunteering and shadowing doctors and physiotherapists at your local sporting clubs and taking up opportunities to observe in sports injury clinics. Membership of the British Association of Sport and Exercise Medicine (www.basem.co.uk) and checking the Faculty of Sport and Exercise Medicine website (www.fsem.co.uk) will also keep you up to date with developments and highlight key courses and conferences.

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Specialist training runs for 4 years and (with some variation) comprises of 3–6-month rotations in accident and emergency, rheumatology, cardiology, respiratory medicine, orthopaedics, rehabilitation medicine, general practice, public health and sport and exercise medicine-specific jobs. This sport and exercise medicine experience is delivered through the regional institutes of sport (for elite athletes), placements with sports teams and NHS sports injury clinics. There is a strong practical focus with the opportunity to learn musculoskeletal ultrasound, perform joint and soft tissue injections, and undertake exercise testing. For the elite athlete this profiles his/her sport-specific fitness, and for the general patient it determines appropriate exercise thresholds.

Passing the Faculty Diploma is a progression criterion from ST4 to ST5. Part 1 is a written exam (extended matching item and single best answer papers), and part 2 is a clinical exam (objective structured clinical examination and viva). Following this you will be eligible to apply for Membership of the Faculty of Sport and Exercise Medicine. Further assessment is through summative processes and following completion of training you will gain a certificate of completion of training and may apply for Fellowship. In addition, some trainees may choose to do an MSc, and if you want to work pitchside then training in delivering emergency care outside of hospital is essential, e.g. resuscitation and emergency management on field.

...And beyond

Following training the world is your oyster. For some, the current paucity of NHS consultant posts may be unnerving, but others see this as an opportunity to build up an ideal work portfolio. Consultant posts are coming; with increasing focus on the prevention and management of obesity, heart disease, diabetes and mental health disorders, primary care trusts are looking for cost-effective ways to deliver care. Step in the sport and exercise medicine consultant who is able to coordinate



and deliver exercise prescription for practically any condition.

Other roles include sports team physician, regional institutes of sport, private clinics and opportunities for teaching and research. Travel can form a large part of the job, either nationally or internationally with teams, or to multisport events such as the Olympics and Commonwealth Games. Any of the above may be done full time or in almost unlimited combinations.

Multidisciplinary working is key; patient-centred care is delivered in this speciality with physiotherapists, dieticians, exercise physiologists, psychologists, surgeons, sports scientists and coaches as well as sport and exercise medicine physicians working closely together. All in all, a rewarding and exciting career! **BJHM**

Conflict of interest: none.

KEY POINTS

- As a specialist trainee you will rotate through sport and exercise medicine, accident and emergency, orthopaedics, rheumatology, cardiology, respiratory medicine, rehabilitation medicine, public health and general practice.
- As a consultant you may work in the NHS seeing musculoskeletal problems and advising on exercise prescription in chronic conditions, privately and/or with elite sport.
- There are ample opportunities for teaching and research.
- You need to thrive in a multidisciplinary setting, be innovative about how and where you work and enjoy being 'hands-on'.