

# A day in the life of a Sports Physician

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**Editor:** David Bui

Interested in sport? Ever wondered who those medical folk are who run onto the pitch? Did you know that being a Sports Physician is an accredited specialty?

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## What is Sports and Exercise Medicine?

**How would you describe what Sports and Exercise Medicine is to a junior doctor who has never heard of it?**

Sport and Exercise Medicine (SEM) is an exciting accredited specialty through the [Australasian College of Sports Physicians](#) that involves:

- Treatment of musculoskeletal injuries in active people, whether they be elite or recreational athletes.
- Prescription of exercise for the management of chronic disease.
- Evaluation of exercise-related symptoms.

Practices differ in the extent to which they undertake each role. In the past musculoskeletal injury has been the focus, but recently the Exercise part of Sport and Exercise Medicine has been increasing in significance, given the strong evidence behind its application to a number of medical conditions, from cardiovascular health to [mental health](#) to [insulin](#) resistance.

## What to expect from working in Sport and Exercise Medicine

## **What has your experience been like in Sport and Exercise Medicine?**

I've had a wonderful time in SEM: It's the world's best job! There is such an extraordinary mix of work: I work with everyone from [sick kids](#) to elite athletes. You have the opportunity to be very procedural, have clinical work, teaching, research and of course team coverage. There are amazing travel opportunities on top of that as well: SEM is truly global.

This wonderful mix of day-to-day life in Sport and Exercise Medicine keeps you interested, passionate, and prevents you from burning out. It is just so rewarding. Plus, hanging out with Usain Bolt in Jamaica isn't something most doctors get to do!

## **What is a day as a Sport and Exercise Physician like?**

Every day is different but a "usual" clinic day for me would involve seeing active adolescents with injuries ranging from common overuse injuries like Osgood-Schlatter disease to more serious conditions such as spinal stress fractures, concussion and ACL tears. This is usually mixed in with exercise testing and prescription for children and adolescents including those with poor exercise tolerance, exercise associated dyspnoea or children with cancer or [diabetes](#) who will benefit from an exercise program but need individualised advice based on their limitations and goals.

Other days will involve a mixture of teaching and research at the university. On days when I'm travelling with teams, it can involve anything from treating injuries and illnesses to choosing appropriate meals for the team to managing jetlag to driving the team bus and acting as baggage handler.

## **A job largely practiced in the private sector**

### **How can junior doctors gain exposure in Sport and Exercise Medicine? Who is it relevant to?**

Given that Sport and Exercise Medicine is almost entirely practiced in the private sector, this is where your opportunities are for exposure. The best way to get this is through sitting in with a Sport and Exercise Medicine Practitioner, whether this be in clinic, in team coverage or another avenue.

Sport and Exercise Medicine Registrars also have weekly teaching sessions on Wednesdays, affectionately known as "Tendon School", of which most sessions are open to doctors who are not yet on the Sport and Exercise Medicine program.

## **The integration into other specialties**

The content and principles of Sport and Exercise Medicine are integral to a number of different specialties outside of the SEM world as well. Musculoskeletal medicine and exercise are an integral part of Paediatrics, as well as General Practice, Emergency Medicine and Orthopaedics.

Unfortunately, it is sometimes difficult to gain exposure in this field given there are currently no formal rotations for JMOs in this community-based specialty. This is

something that I hope will change in the future. The Children's Institute of Sports Medicine is the only SEM practice which is co-located within a Public Hospital, as well as a Children's Hospital and we're hoping a training post will become available for a Paediatric Resident or Registrar.

Another option is covering the local football or sporting team, as these things are often out of office hours. This is more of an apprentice model and generally doctors are happy to have an extra "set of hands" so to speak. Personally, my first team coverage was the Ironman Triathlon in Hawaii as a medical student - which was in and of itself an absolutely amazing example of endurance physiology in action.

## What can junior doctors do to prepare themselves for a career in Sport and Exercise Medicine?

As mentioned on the Australasian College of Sports Physicians website, there are a number of "Foundation Terms" that JMOs should try and rotate through during their hospital time - especially Orthopaedics, General Medicine and Emergency. Other beneficial terms would include Rheumatology or ICU. Another basic requirement is sitting the Part 1 Examination, which can be done at any stage before applying to the 4-year program.

Showing an interest in Sport and Exercise Medicine is one of the criteria for acceptance onto the training program and so many of our successful candidates have sat in with various SEM doctors, done sports coverage for a number of years, attended conferences such as the Sports Medicine Australia conference or the local ACSP conferences, undertaken research or gone on to do post graduate Sports Medicine degrees.

## Take home messages

Sport and Exercise Medicine is a rewarding career choice that gives you a huge mix of day to day options.

Training takes 4 years and acceptance onto the training program includes a number of compulsory "Foundation Terms", sitting the Part 1 Examination and demonstrating an interest in SEM as a career.

The principles and content of SEM medicine are hugely beneficial to a number of specialties, including Paediatrics, General Practice, Emergency Medicine and Orthopaedics.

For more information about SEM, please visit the ACSP website: <http://acsp.org.au/>

Dr Carolyn Broderick was interviewed for *onthewards* by Dr David Bui.

David is an Intern at Royal North Shore Hospital and has an interest in Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine. He is the previous Founder and President of the [University of New South Wales Sports Medicine Society](#).

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