

Sports Medicine

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The National Survey on Sports Participation showed that the number of Singaporeans who exercised regularly at least once a week doubled from 24% in 1992 to 48% in 2005. The number who exercised at least 3 times a week more than tripled from 8% to 25% in the same period. In 2008, Singapore will see 3 full marathons (or races over longer distances) on the calendar, whereas previous years only featured one. There are also numerous triathlons (including a half “Ironman”) and ultra-marathons on the annual calendar. Participation rates at the annual Singapore Marathon have seen exponential increases in recent years, to a record of 40,000 runners in 2007.

As the number of physically active individuals increases, so too does the demand for Sports Medicine by members of the public. Concurrently, exercise intervention in the management and prevention of chronic diseases is becoming entrenched, further increasing the need for professionals in the exercise arena. At the elite level, more and more Singaporeans and foreign sports talents based in Singapore train and compete professionally, demanding higher support levels for Sports Medicine and Sports Science. The construction of the S\$1.5 billion sports hub, an injection of S\$500 million for sports over the next 5 years, and Singapore’s hosting of the inaugural Youth Olympic Games, the world’s first Formula One race to be held at night, and the Volvo Ocean Race, will all serve only to fuel the demand for Sports and Exercise Medicine.

Sports Medicine was first introduced in Singapore as far back as 1973, with the establishment of the Sports Medicine and Research Centre by the Singapore Sports Council (SSC). Singapore Armed Forces’ (SAF) Soldier Performance Centre was another hotbed for Sports Medicine in the early years. At the turn of the millennium, Sports Physicians ventured beyond the SSC and SAF, and started practising in restructured hospitals, such as Changi General Hospital, Alexandra Hospital, and KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital. Private Sports Medicine centres and clinics have also sprouted up in the past few years.

Last year, Sports Medicine was recognised as a subspecialty in Singapore. Doctors who have exited from Internal Medicine, Emergency Medicine, Orthopaedic

Surgery, or Family Medicine are eligible for 3 years of subspecialty training in Sports Medicine before exiting as a “Sports Physician”. November 2007 saw the Changi Sports Medicine Centre taking in Singapore’s very first Sports Medicine trainee.

Sports Orthopaedic Surgery, the surgical arm of Sports Medicine, has similarly expanded into an established major subspecialty of Orthopaedic Surgery both internationally and locally. In the last few years, at least one surgeon annually from Singapore has undertaken formal overseas fellowship training in Orthopaedic Sports Medicine and Arthroscopy. With this training has come a shift in surgical philosophy. When surgery for sports injuries is indicated, the benchmark of success is often no longer just the alleviation of pain or instability but, more importantly, a return to the patient’s pre-injury level of sporting activity.

In developed countries, Sports and Exercise Medicine is a popular field: The American College of Sports Medicine has more than 20,000 members worldwide; the Italian Federation of Sports Medicine Doctors has 4405 members, about half of whom are fully accredited Sports Medicine specialists.

As healthcare becomes fragmented, doctors who are familiar with managing the “whole athlete” become crucial. These doctors are expected not only to return injured athletes back to their sport expeditiously and safely (instead of simply asking the patient to rest), but also to manage medical conditions with the specific demands of the sport in mind, and be proficient in exercise testing and exercise prescription (especially for chronic disease management). Moreover, they are expected to interact professionally and comfortably with coaches, trainers, and team managers, to be proficient in running the medical aspects of major sporting events, to be thoroughly familiar with doping control and education, and be able to serve professionally in the medical commissions or committees of national and international sporting bodies. This issue of the *Annals* covers a wide variety of papers, from Sports Medicine, to Sports Orthopaedics, Sports Physiotherapy, and Sports Science, reflecting Sports Medicine’s broad scope. We hope readers will find them an interesting read.

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