

Are we sports physiotherapists working as a team as well as we could?

Hamish Ashton

Sports medicine is seen as one of the fields that we, as health practitioners, work together as a team for the betterment of the athlete. I believe that we do this well. Health practitioners also need to be able to work well with another team to truly get the best for the athlete—the management team.¹ The personnel in this relationship can appear to have different goals with the management/coaching staff wanting fit players ‘now’, and the medical staff wanting to protect the short-term and long-term health of the athlete. Add to the mix the athlete who wants to get out there and play but sometimes needs to be protected from himself or herself.

It is amazing that this can, and does, work well at times. However, for all those who have followed the social media over the last year there are many recent episodes when it has gone wrong. So, what has gone wrong? When you have top players, good-quality managers and some excellent sports medicine providers, how does the system fail?

COMMUNICATION AND RESPECT

Although I mentioned we can have differing goals, I feel that this is not the key issue. These goals may often appear different but we all want success, which these days is largely measured by winning. The answer that I believe we need is good communication, and in my 25 years’ experience on the sideline this needs to

come with a degree of respect for each other. In my personal experience I have had many more good sideline experiences than bad ones, and this ratio keeps improving over time. I believe this improvement reflects my better understanding of at least three elements—sport, myself and coaching.

I now have a good understanding of the game I work with, and I understand the nature of the competition, be it tournament or knock out. My goals are the same as those of the players and coaching staff—I want my team to win. This doesn’t change when I treat an injured player. I want to rehabilitate him or her to get back out and help the team win. Players can’t do this if they haven’t recovered fully or are in danger of further injury. So what do I do? I explain clearly in language the coach and player can understand what I feel is the best decision for today and next week, and with this good communication, and a touch of respect, we all get a positive outcome in the long run. It illustrates shared decision-making in our field.²

THE VALUES WE PROMOTE AT SPORTS PHYSIOTHERAPY NEW ZEALAND (SPNZ)

It is this approach that I try to follow as President of SPNZ. Our members are now my athletes. I want to do my best for all members not only now, but also through the ‘seasons ahead’. In my role I come across many other people and professional groups that feel they offer value to help our members succeed and attain

their goals. However, selecting the right team members can determine the success of the organisation. These team members may be in the form of a journal, such as our partner the *BJSM*, or other professional bodies, be it nationally, or internationally.

Communication, with a dash of respect, again is vital in this team. With good communication, SPNZ can help coordinate with our members what is going to work best for them to succeed. With the groups all working together for the good of all, success and progress follow. I look forward to working with you in 2016 and I encourage you to communicate with me and the SPNZ board as communication is a two-way activity. You’ll find great opportunities to share ideas and communicate with respected colleagues at SPNZ Education events. One of them is Physiotherapy New Zealand (PNZ) annual meeting in Auckland 16–18 September. Great programme includes World Confederation of Physical Therapy (WCPT) President, Dr Emma Stokes (<http://ow.ly/XcXhr>).

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