
What is sports medicine? Medical students don't know

EDITOR—A large proportion of the population participates in sport occasionally and these envelopes a devoted core that plays often. As sport is a large part of British culture and its practice has direct effects on the body, one may infer that its study is of significance to doctors. Logically, a medical student would have an interest in learning about such a topic, as it would be a factor in future patient care. It should follow that medical schools would seek to include compulsory sports medicine training as part of a well rounded undergraduate curriculum. This is, unfortunately, not the case.

Few medical schools include compulsory training in sports medicine. Often, the only exposure a student receives is sport related fracture management during an orthopaedic rotation. Consequently, many medical students have little idea what sports medicine is and do not realise that it encompasses much more than treatment of injury.

A sports trained doctor may be better able to advise on sport as part of a healthy lifestyle for both the lay population and athletes. This type of training allows the doctor to have greater understanding of how sport can affect a patient’s health and how their health can be affected by sport.

It is encouraging that some medical schools have begun to include sports medicine in their curriculum, including those designed for clinical students. Glasgow University leads the way with an intercalated BSc programme designed specifically for medical undergraduates. More compulsory sports medicine needs to be instituted, so that even if a student is not interested in it as a career, he/she will be better equipped to understand and deal with sport related issues in future clinical practice.

Greater exposure at the undergraduate level is also likely to spark further interest and recruitment to what is a new and exciting area of medicine.

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The report of the British Nutrition Foundation Task Force on obesity is a very important document. It is a pity therefore that it is so boring to dip into and read. Certain of the importance of this report, and mindful of my responsibilities to the British Journal of Sports Medicine, I brought this book with me on holiday. I tried to read it, oh yes I did. Every attempt was soon met with a gradual drooping of the eyelids and then blessed sleep in the sunshine. The presentation, with few illustrations, was the problem, but this, however, is my only criticism.

This multi-author report is chaired by Professor Garrow, an expert in the field of obesity, and the members and contributors comprise some of the most important workers on obesity in the United Kingdom. It is very timely, given that the prevalence of obesity in this country in 1995 (body mass index greater than 30 kg/m$^2$) had risen to 13% of men and 16% of women, and over half the population are now overweight (body mass index greater than 25 kg/m$^2$ but less than 30 kg/m$^2$) or obese. The report is extremely up to date, covering such areas as the new genetics of obesity (leptin and human obesity syndromes) and new treatments such as use of the pancreatic lipase inhibitor Orlistat. The references are relevant, and go right up to 1998. Every aspect of obesity, from epidemiology and health risks through clinical assessment, aetiology, prevention, treatment, and suggestions for further research are covered. The book's target audience is really all of us—thos that it defines as communicators, including government, health and local authorities, health care professionals, researchers, the food industry, and journalists. Traditionally, exercise has not been given priority in obesity treatment programmes or commercial weight loss programmes. However, the prevalence of obesity
is increasing in our population despite the fact that the total energy intake of the population has actually fallen for the last 25 years. This is totally due to an increase in the sedentary nature of the population, with lifestyle related inactivity (resulting from increased availability of labour saving technology) and fewer people participating in active exercise.

“Lose weight fast” diets are exposed for their non-physiological and ineffectual approach. An optimal treatment combining diet, physical activity, and behavioural modification will enable weight loss maintenance to continue after an achievable goal, such as loss of 10% of weight, has been achieved.

The book is divided into two very practical sections. The first is recommendations from the Task Force—to prevent the increasing prevalence of obesity, to change the national diet to lower the consumption of energy dense food, to change the national lifestyle to have a higher level of physical activity, and lastly to institute strategies nationally for both prevention and treatment of obesity. The second contains answers to questions from medical journalists, which are in fact questions that many of the population would ask us.

To summarise, would I want to buy this book personally? No, because it does not excite me enough to grab some of the limited space on my shelves. Would I want to have it to hand? Yes, Yes, Yes. This is a definitive text on obesity. Am I glad I got to keep it for doing this review? Yes, I am, thank you.

**Analysis**

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**David C Wilson**

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**Letters to the editor, Conference report, Book reviews**


This book has some useful guidelines for any physiotherapist contemplating a switch from hospital employment to being a full time physiotherapist with a sports team. The author is realistic about the commitment required and weighs up the benefits and disadvantages of such a move. The dynamics of a team approach to providing medical/physiotherapy support and the need for excellent communication between members of the team and other teaching and managerial staff at a club are covered very well. His expectation of what a team doctor with a qualification in sport and exercise medicine might be able to deal with before making a secondary referral is somewhat limited.

Overall the book lacks structure. There is no systematic approach to chapter headings, or the layout within the chapters, which makes it difficult to follow. It falls between being a conventional textbook and a practical handbook. The book is littered with case studies intended to illustrate points. I felt these were a distraction; many were anecdotal and served little purpose. The mixture of sport specific areas and general topics means that there is repetition. There is also consid-

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This book is too good to hurry. I was at first disappointed as I had misunderstood that it would address itself more exclusively to postgraduate issues, my chief domain. Its 36 chapters pertain to the education of the so termed “beginning practitioner”, defined as “the level of competence and stage of prepa-

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**Paul D Jackson**

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This handbook is designed as a reference book for students of sports massage and complementary therapies.

The book is divided into easy reading chapters, and terminology used is basic medical language. Sections of the book outlining basic massage techniques have good detail and are supported with clear referenced photographs. The chapter identifying injury problems is somewhat lightweight, and little reference is made to the importance of making a specific diagnosis. Timing of the healing stages and effects that massage may have at these stages is also not detailed.

Throughout the chapters there are no references to current scientific literature to support the authors’ comments. Information on the relation to specific sports and the different massage techniques found to be beneficial—for example, for before and after competitions—is also not evident. The later chapters introduce the reader to a variety of complementary medicines—for example, aromatherapy and reflexology—but no further practical techniques are outlined.

A short bibliography of further reading is available, although this is somewhat dated.

The quality of information provided is somewhat basic, and regretably has nothing practical for the experienced sports massage practitioner. The book does, however, provide a basic introduction to the art of sports massage for a student wishing to pursue this field.

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**Elaine Atkins**

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