

Working in sports medicine

New Zealand sports medicine specialists talk about the reality of working within this field

Why did you choose sports medicine and what do you like most?

The patient load in this specialty comprises athletes as well as active members of the general population, and encompasses all age ranges and some special needs groups. It is rewarding to work with patients who are generally healthy, motivated and positive. The specialty is varied and interesting and combines work in the gym and on the sports field with office consultancy, management, academic work and teaching.

What strengths and abilities make a good sports medicine specialist?

It is important to be enthusiastic about physical activities and to be able to relate to sporting people. You also need to be able to function as part of a team and work under pressure.

As a specialist, can you describe a typical day?

The job involves a mixture of research, office consulting and working with individuals and teams at training sessions and competitions.

What do you think are the future challenges of sports medicine?

The specialty needs to focus on providing education for patients and other practitioners about the role of the sports physician in the diagnosis and management of sports medicine conditions. It will also be a challenge to continue to generate evidence-based research in the field of sports medicine.

What advice would you give someone thinking about a career in sports medicine?

It is recommended that you talk to sports physicians, establish contact with the Australasian College of Sports Physicians, attend sports medicine conferences and demonstrate enthusiasm for the specialty. Postgraduate academic training (both pre- and post-ACSP training) is well regarded.

What are future opportunities in sports medicine?

Sports medicine is an expanding area. There are currently 13 sports physicians working in New Zealand and this number will increase over time.

What is the work/life balance like?

It is relatively easy to take time out, although sports medicine is still very much a male-dominated profession. In New Zealand only two of the 13 active sports physicians are women.

The impact of the specialty on family life will depend upon the type of practice, although generally there is not much after-hours call. For sports physicians with team attachments the hours of work

can be antisocial (since most games occur in the evenings and on weekends) and there can be a significant amount of travel involved. Team physicians are usually on call 24/7.