

A LETTER FROM

AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND

Being a Sports Medicine Registrar – a Kiwi experience

– Written by Sarah Beable,
New Zealand



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When finishing medical school we face a vast array of options regarding the kind of medical speciality we wish to practice and the type of doctor we want to be. Sports medicine started for me in the first aid tent volunteering at the local track and field meetings. This, coupled with sideline rugby doctoring, ignited a curiosity and passion for both musculoskeletal medicine and event medical management. While continuing to work as Emergency doctor I concurrently completed the Post Graduate Sports Medicine Diploma through the University of Auckland. The decision to specialize in sports medicine coincided with being a doctor at the Rugby World Cup at Wellington stadium in 2011 as I wanted more of that buzz of being involved in a medical team at such a great event. Soon after this I elected to sit the examinations to join the Australasian College of Sports Medicine training programme.

I am so pleased I did! The past four years have truly been a fulfilling and eye opening

journey. Flying back after my final sports medicine fellowship clinical exam a few weeks ago prompted me to scan through my 'case presentation' file reflecting on the extremes and breadth of medical and musculoskeletal knowledge I have been exposed to. Even the past 12 months has involved managing a multi car collision with a travelling team, anaphylaxis reaction, compound fracture, mumps, myocarditis, cauda equina syndrome and a vertebral artery dissection in a contact sports person. Not a typical year for sure but I am grateful that I spent time working in rural general practice, military medicine, emergency departments and as a medical registrar before specialising and dealing with such pathologies!

Attending multiple international conferences such as the IOC injury and illness prevention conference in Monaco, the Advanced Team Physician course in both Nice and Doha plus the annual Sports Medicine New Zealand and College conferences provided excellent educational updates and networking opportunities. There is a required research component to gaining our speciality fellowship, not only to gain an understanding of the processes required for quality research, but also contributing to current concepts that

frames the basis for our clinical practice. My research has been in depression and life stress in elite athletes; a topic that is gaining more momentum and am looking forward to continuing to work in this area in years to come. Female athlete health, and promoting exercise in communities are areas of interest for me and have been excited by the name change of our college to Australasian college of sports and exercise medicine physicians (ACSEP). I believe this reflects the collective

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Image: Sarah Beable (in the middle) with NZOC health team colleagues prior to Rio Olympics opening ceremony.

expertise in exercise medicine and the global push towards increasing community activity levels for improving general health and reducing overall morbidity.

Our training scheme ensures we have exposure to a wide range of sporting events and that is easily done in the busy New Zealand sporting culture. These have included being sideline at the International Rugby Sevens at Wellington stadium, international BMX events, travelling with the Silver Ferns netball team to their annual matches against Australia, being part of the medical team at the Hawaii Ironman, and being the medical lead at the ITU World Cup triathlon champs in Auckland in 2015. Elite athlete management is a compulsory part of the fellowship training programme and fortunately for me this is one of the things I love most about my work. I have been working for High Performance Sport New Zealand as the Medical Director for New Zealand Cycling, which has been an amazing experience. It

has been challenging at times to manage the academic demands of the training programme and continuing to work in private practice, but I've relished diving into optimising health and performance in a group very talented athletes and working in a large interdisciplinary team with a common goal of helping these athletes go faster and achieve their Olympic dreams.

My passport definitely has a few more stamps now with travel being a large part of being a sports medicine doctor. Having been one of the New Zealand team doctors for the Glasgow Commonwealth Games and Rio Olympic Games is something I will never forget and such a unique experience. Growing up with the life dream of wanting to be a top athlete I always imagined the feeling of marching into the opening ceremony in the New Zealand uniform. Although I have done this in a different capacity, the pride I feel reflecting on the two times I've been lucky enough to do so, is something I will always treasure.

Like any job or life experience the people around you are what make the job enjoyable. Attending my first registrar conference in Sydney back in 2013 I recall the feeling of being surrounded by like-minded individuals. The friendships formed amongst trainee colleagues and being surrounded by incredible sports physician mentors who have continued to teach and support throughout has been the highlight of sports medicine training for me.

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