

Pathways to careers in dance medicine and science: Panel Discussion

22nd Annual Meeting of the International Association for Dance Medicine and Science, Singapore

Friday October 26, 8:45-9:05am

Moderated by: Sarah Beck, MSc (IADMS Student Committee Chair)

For this panel session we invited four professionals working within diverse specialisms in dance medicine and science to provide students and early career professionals with examples of careers and the pathways that have been taken to achieve these. Each of our panellists provided excellent advice as well as an account of their own experiences, which are summarised below.

Selina Shah, MD, FACP

- Board Certified Sports medicine and Internal Medicine Physician
- Member of IADMS Board of Directors

Own pathway

- Started as a gymnast moving towards rhythmic gymnastics. However the programme fell through so found a way into dance
- Academically loved Math and Science
- Always exposed to medicine as her father was a surgeon
- Was a Science major at Undergraduate level and continued dancing
- Made aware of IADMS through her dance teacher
- Then went to medical school, which had a fantastic sports medicine department that worked in primary care sports medicine. This gave an opportunity to specialise and to also see dancers. This was a perfect combination of interests.

Advice

- Advice would differ between geographical areas. The US, Europe and Asia are all extremely different.
- In US you have to do very well in high school, achieve straight A's, and complete honours classes at degree level that lean towards science subjects.
- In Europe it is important to specialise earlier on through GCSE and A level subjects.
- Medical school is very competitive, therefore it is important to try and volunteer in a clinic/ hospital/ nursing home. Doing this as early on is valuable experience to make you more desirable (e.g. completing work experience during high school/secondary school)

- There are lots of pre-requisite requirements to get into medical school in the US. You have to complete all of these during 4 year Undergraduate; therefore you need to get started early to ensure that all of these are met
- It is important during clinical years to explore different fields and decide what to aspire to. This is also competitive, the more specialised the fewer opportunities there are. It is therefore important that you gain as much experience as possible in that specialist field and ensure that you are at the top of your class.

Tom Welsh, PhD

- Professor of Dance at Florida State University, USA
- Past President of IADMS

Own pathway

- Gymnastics scholarship to University, danced following degree
- PhD in Psychology
- Returned to do a Graduate degree in Dance
- Was originally invited to be considered for a teaching position and 'made it work'. It required being flexible and when first offered the position willing to do anything and as I did it they started to see that the things I could offer were beneficial

Advice

- Our field is opportunistic and we have to make our own careers. You need to help people understand that you can do for them
- Being flexible is important; sometimes we have to be willing to do something in a direction different to where we want to go. You don't always know is on the other side of the hill, but you have to be willing to go there to see

Charlotte Woodcock, PhD

- Lecturer in sport and exercise psychology at Staffordshire University, UK
- Applied practitioner

Own pathway

- Undergraduate degree in Psychology where interest in Performance Psychology and Sport Psychology started.
- Masters in Performance Psychology with view to continuing that work in a sporting realm, working with athletes.
- Became interested in research side and went on to do a PhD in Applied Sport Psychology
- Gathered applied experiences alongside research and an opportunity came up in dance. Charlotte realised from this opportunity that there was a recognised need for the type of work that is delivered in Sports Psychology in a dance context and has continued to work in dance for the past 2 years

Advice

- The title of a Psychologist is protected; therefore accreditation is very important to work in Psychology. In the UK this involves a decision between applied practice or research
- Accreditation requires post-graduate specialism and 2-6 years (min 500hrs) of supervised applied practice (BASES)
- Need to do your Undergraduate Psychology degree at a recognised institution, and complete Postgraduate and supervised applied experiences.
- There is a new arm of practice psychology that is drawing on work of sports psychology. It is exciting being involved in development

Moira McCormack, PT

- Head of Physiotherapy at the Royal Ballet Company, UK
- Member of IADMS Board of Directors

Own pathway

- Started as professional dancer, in Royal Ballet School and Company
- Always interested in medicine
- Took a year off due to bad back injury and did a professional dancers teachers course, this led to doing some teaching before carrying on dancing
- Decided to retire and completed a Physiotherapy course, working in the NHS (hospital work) for nearly 2 years.
- Decided not suited to working in hospitals and went to work with small remedial dance clinic in London. This resulted in an understanding of dance injuries, technique and the relationship between them, eventually went to work for Royal Ballet School and then Company
- 'Fortunate pathway'

Advice

- In the UK it is hard to get into physiotherapy school. Keep trying and be determined.
- It is difficult to get jobs in NHS. It is important to get first-hand experience and you have to do that to get yourself well educated in order to specialise.
- When specialise the usual pathway is outpatients, then sports injuries, then perhaps leaving to work in a clinic – following this it may be appropriate to work in dance
- Young physiotherapists want to work with dancers, but have to have experience first. Volunteering and observing in your spare time will help to build up experience
- Options to do placement in dance clinic very rare during UK degree programmes. It is best to get all you can out of being in hospital first.
- For a position working with professional dancers employers will probably look for a Masters in Sports Physiotherapy and very well practiced, educated, and experienced individual.