

Creating the dream team: Introducing participatory sports and exercise medicine via “Patient Voices”

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There is an accelerating movement calling for decision-making processes that centre the patient as the key driver of their own health care process. This concept of “Participatory Medicine” is a world far removed from conventional, patriarchal, or top-down healthcare approaches where the clinician “expert” drove all decision making processes, and the patient was merely a passive passenger along the journey. Organisations such as the Society for Participatory Medicine¹ have empowered patients and helped change the archaic healthcare dynamic. Active patient engagement and participation is also growing steadily in research.

Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) is a pathway to improve the quality and the translation of research; patients participate as collaborators on research grants and authors on research outputs.² Patients have also been embedded in research conferences, including Stanford University’s “Medicine X” series of conferences where the patient is placed “at the centre of the academic medicine”.³ By actively contributing in these ways, patients are able to help clinicians and researchers understand the problems that are important to them and they can challenge conventional thinking to drive future healthcare efforts in the research community.⁴

Sport and exercise medicine: following the BMJ’s leadership

In sport and exercise medicine (SEM) there are currently few examples where an integrated knowledge translation approach has been taken and where the patient or athlete has been truly involved throughout the entire research process. The active involvement of patients and athletes at all levels of SEM research will facilitate the development, production, and implementation of SEM interventions that are participant centred, and that are better suited to translate from “ideal” research settings to real-world contexts.

Whilst the application of qualitative research methods in sports and exercise medicine (SEM) is in its infancy, there is much to be learned about the context and process of sport and exercise’s influence on the communities we serve from the community members themselves. Working with patients and athletes in research design has the potential to facilitate the knowledge translation process⁵. By listening to patient and athlete perspectives, clinicians and researchers are likely to help construct trials in SEM which are robust and athlete-focused, and which ultimately will be better-placed to have a greater clinical impact.

The BMJ is recognized as the global publishing leader in PPI via its “Patient Partnership” strategy.⁶ Since 2014, they have invited patients to co-create articles for the journal with their clinicians, and have encouraged authors to outline exactly how they have involved their patients in all aspects of research. These co-created papers are subjected to peer review by a network of patients, ensuring that the research process is patient-centred throughout. We are excited to follow The BMJ’s example in the field of sport and exercise medicine.

BJSM’s Patient Voices series

The British Journal of Sports Medicine’s (BJSM) “Patient Voices” series signals the beginning of patient-centered elements in the journal. To help launch this series,

Jermain Defoe (an international footballer who plays in the English Premier league for AFC Bournemouth) shares his thoughts on the clinical care of the experienced athlete.⁷ This is the first patient and athlete story we share.

The BJSM audience is global. We intend to use this platform to amplify the experiences of sport and exercise participants that reflect the diversity of the communities served by the BJSM audience. We hope that these stories will help SEM professionals to be more aware of the journeys of those who seek our services, and that that awareness is then used to inform how we our own develop, produce, and implement research, education and clinical initiatives.

So what are you waiting for? Please encourage your communities to share stories from recreational and elite athletes and patients on the BJSM Patient Voices platform. These stories will help educate the SEM community on how our management strategies and the language we use in the clinic or in the club impacts athletes and players, on personal and performance levels.

We will cover both positive and negative stories with the overall aim of enabling the patient to have a platform to educate us, the SEM practitioner, on how to look after them better in the future. In keeping with The BMJ model, patients will have sole authorship of the articles and more information about this series is available on the “Patient Voices” section of the BJSM website.⁸ We look forward to receiving and sharing your Patient Voices, and hope you will join us in ensuring that the athletes, patients, and communities we serve truly are part of the SEM team.

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