Injuries in the performing arts research paper

Art & Culture, Artists

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Introduction

One might be inclined to think that injuries are only prone in sports like soccer, football, athletics and indoor games. This misconstrued notion is not only fallacious but also misguided. It is not uncommon for members of the performing arts to complain of numbness, pain and at times serious injuries. For a long time, performance related injuries have plagued the performance arts. Of interest is the fact that it was not until the early 1980s that the term ‘ Performing Arts Medicine’ was coined. The emergence of the term and by extension the recognition of the injuries in performance arts was due to a change of outlook of performance-related injuries in the performing arts and the ability of medicine to deal with such injuries. Performance arts are a significant part of history. Therefore, it is important to delve into performance related injuries in performance arts. As such, this paper will evaluate the injuries in the performance arts.

Amateur and professional musicians are often confronted by injuries and conditions that are related to the dances they perform, the instruments they play and the arts medium they choose. The injuries and conditions affect

their performance. They include sprains, tendinitis, repetitive motion disorders like carpal tunnel syndrome, muscle strains, dystonias, myofascial, back and neck pains, orthopedic, musculoskeletal and neurological conditions. These conditions affect the careers of musicians negatively. As such, the ability of medicine to deal with such injuries should be exploited to the benefit of the musicians. However, the major impediment is the ignorance (Murphy, 2012).

For instance, the policy of ‘ No Pain, No Gain’ has been adopted by dancers. This disastrous policy has dealt a blow to the careers of many dancers. After an injury, the artists do not allow themselves enough time to recover. Consequently, the symptoms of the injury reoccur immediately the activity is restarted. The remedy is not performing through the pain once on is injured. In addition, musicians and dancers generally ought to reduce force, find and assume postures that maintain joints within the middle of their usual range of motion. Musicians and dancers also ought to use larger groups of muscles where feasible and minimize fixed and tensed positions. This will reduce the propensity for injury while performing (Santiago et al,. 2004).

Most of the injuries in performing arts are caused and exacerbated by non-ergonomic technique, incorrect posture, overuse, excessive force and insufficient rest. All these factors contribute to chronic injuries that at times cause excruciating pain, disability and a possible end of careers. The injuries represent more than a pain or an ache to the performing artist. As such, it is very hard to persuade the performing artist to stop or reduce their performance in order to allow their injuries time to heal. This exacerbates the injuries to the extent that they are career threatening. It is for this

reason that injuries in performance arts are of interest. In contrast, participants in other fields like soccer have to undergo physiotherapy before they can resume participation. This helps their injuries heal and therefore salvage their careers.

Instrumental musicians are a vulnerable group for musculoskeletal injuries. A significant percentage of them suffer injuries due to the nature of their work. The routine daily activities that instrumental musicians involve themselves in place a lot of demand on the body, thereby contributing to the development of musculoskeletal injuries. Instrumental musicians spend many hours rehearsing, practicing, and performing. This predisposes them to musculoskeletal injuries. Many studies have revealed that 50-80% of musicians suffer physical problems in their careers. The studies show that the greatest risk was in keyboardists and string players. Most likely, the increased risk is attributed to postural demands imposed by playing the instruments. Playing such instruments requires constant rapid movements over prolonged periods of time. This is done at forces that at times exceed the capability of the body to repair the torn tissues without sufficient recovery time.

Recommendations

Several factors may predispose performing artists to injuries. Of particular importance in understanding the risk factors involved. This is important because it helps one find ways to minimize the risk factors in effective ways to prevent the catastrophic and potentially career-terminating effects of musculoskeletal injuries. Since the greatest risk of musculoskeletal injuries occurs when using new instruments, changing techniques and prolonged

playing, it is recommendable for performing artists to factor in time for rest. When perfecting a new technique, a technically difficult piece, and preparing for a performance, it is imperative that performing artists get sufficient rest in order to allow their muscles time to rest and tissues to regenerate (Howse & McCormack, 2009).

Another risk factor to musculoskeletal injury is environmental factor. Performing artists should take into consideration cold temperatures, the layout of space, surfaces, equipment and lighting. These factors could predispose one to musculoskeletal injuries. For instance, cold temperatures affect muscular contraction and by extension the range of motion. They also affect conduction be nerves and the blood flow to the fingers. Slippery surfaces could cause dangerous falls. It is for this reason that these environmental factors ought to be considered. Physical demands of their routines also play as a factor predisposing one to injuries. As such, awkward postures, prolonged durations of activities, forceful exertion, vibration and repetition are some of the aspects a performing artist ought to consider (DeLisa, Gans, & Walsh, (2004). It is therefore importance to space out performances in order to allow time for rest and the regeneration of torn and worn out tissues.

The final recommendation involves focus on one’s personal characteristics. Factors like individual posture, flexibility, endurance, strength and comorbid health conditions are important. Exercise is of importance in order to improve these personal characteristics. It is also important to check on one’s nutritional status and reduce psychological stress (Kogan, 2002).

Psychological stress and poor nutritional status accompany a challenging schedule may retard healing or elevate the risk for injury.

Limitations

It is not always possible to select an environment that is well lit and sufficiently heated. The remedy would be for the performing artist to wear warm clothing in order to maintain body warmth and adequate blood flow. However, this might not be in line with the fashion requirements of performing arts. Another limitation is the busy schedule that most performing artists lead. This does not allow them enough time for recreation and exercise. As such, many have poor nutritional status which predisposes them to injury.

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