

## Sports medicine: a career for all genders?

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(<http://www.ecosep.eu/en/dawnbio>)

Dawn Thompson, covering Brighton Marathon

I am pleased to step aside from writing for the blog today and turn over the stage to [Dawn Thompson](https://cjsmblog.com/2015/04/12/ultrasound-in-sports-medicine/), [CJSM Junior Associate Editor \(https://cjsmblog.com/2015/04/12/ultrasound-in-sports-medicine/\)](https://cjsmblog.com/2015/04/12/ultrasound-in-sports-medicine/) and a member of the [ECOSEP Junior Doctors Committee \(http://www.ecosep.eu/Junior-Doctors-Committee\)](http://www.ecosep.eu/Junior-Doctors-Committee).

Dawn and I have a shared background in sports medicine, but she brings a unique perspective to today's post: she is a woman, she is young, and she is still in training. I am none of these things!

If sports is a mirror of society, then it should come as no surprise that in our own professional world [we may see phenomena \(https://cjsmblog.com/2014/04/15/gender-issues-in-sport/\)](https://cjsmblog.com/2014/04/15/gender-issues-in-sport/) such as gender bias. And for those of us who benefit from male privilege (me), Dawn's post is a great reminder of the differential burden our female colleagues may face when trying to perform the same job duties as a man.

Here in the USA, 2016 is a particularly poignant moment in time: the Democratic party's presumptive candidate for president is Hillary Clinton. Will that political 'glass ceiling' be shattered? What of our sports medicine colleagues who are women? Do they face their own glass ceilings?

I cede the dais to Dawn:

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*DT: It's 1.30am on a Tuesday morning and I am wide awake. Ideas, thoughts, concepts are racing through my mind at a rate I could only dream of during normal hours. I don't normally suffer with insomnia but I have just completed a particularly gruelling acute medical block whereby in 4 months I have worked 8 full weekends and a total of 32 nights. So as you can see my body clock is totally up the spout. There have been times when I have wondered why I chose this profession and how compatible it is with any sort of family or social life and times when I have marveled at what I feel can be the best 'job' in the world.*

During these 4 months, Junior Doctors like myself across Britain have taken part in 6 days of industrial action in response to the proposed imposition of a contract they felt to be unsafe and unfair to patients, themselves and the NHS. One of the many complaints with regards to the new contract was the impact it could potentially have on women taking time out for maternity or to work less than full-time to raise a family. Indeed the governments own equality analysis summarised –

*"While there are features of the new contract that impact disproportionately on women, of which some we expect to be advantageous and others disadvantageous, we do not consider that this would amount to indirect discrimination as the impacts can be comfortably justified" (<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/junior-doctors-outraged-over-new-contract-that-discriminates-against-single-women-a6963356.html>)*

I have never particularly considered myself a feminist but I do expect a fair contract and I don't expect to be treated any differently to my male counterparts based on gender rather than clinical acumen.

Data derived from the Health and Social Care Annual Workforce Publication 2014 showed that 57% of all doctors in training are female. However things have not always been this way, in 1985 the year I was born, [women made up only 16% of practicing doctors in the US \(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women\\_in\\_medicine\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_medicine). Some junior doctors are concerned that an unfair contract would send us backwards in terms of women in Medicine. Already prior to this new proposed contract, pay inequalities exist in medicine. A study published this week in the BMJ concluded that [women doctors in the US earn less than their male counterparts even after adjusting for hours of work and specialty \(http://www.bmj.com/content/353/bmj.i2923\)](http://www.bmj.com/content/353/bmj.i2923).

So what about the role of women in Sports Medicine? Sports, in particular team sports, have historically been a male dominated environment.

There are relatively few women holding top positions both in the UK and the US. In a BBC interview Paula Radcliffe was quoted as stating "Too often in sport, doctors are men and they don't understand". Suggesting there is a real need for female Sports Physicians within the profession.

In the last 15-20 years more and more female sports doctors are taking on roles with the big clubs though. Women of all ages are more physically active than ever before and women's sports are rapidly growing, with high level Olympic performances in nearly all events (<http://edition.cnn.com/2012/08/10/sport/london-olympics-women/>). In 2012 nearly 45% of all Olympic athletes were women compared to 10% in the 1950s. Many doctors specialising in Sports and Exercise Medicine are former athletes and so female interest in this field is growing.

But is the world of Sport ready for us? In 2014 at the Swedish FA medical conference Dr Eva Carneiro gave a fantastic interview on the challenges faced by female doctors, particularly those wanting to break into sports medicine. It is well worth a watch and surprising how true her thoughts on media portrayal of female doctors are (<https://youtu.be/WI1vGq6YfU4>)!

A Women in Football (<https://www.womeninfootball.co.uk/>) survey in 2014 showed that 2/3rds of those working in football had been subjected to sexism, with 89% stating they did not report it for fear of not being taken seriously. Last year a month-long campaign was launched to combat sexism in football after particularly offensive and sexist chants were heard at Premiership games around the country.

USEMS (The University Sports and Exercise Medicine Society) in the UK last year chose to focus their first-edition eMagazine (<http://www.basem.co.uk/usems/usems-emagazine/>) on the Female Athlete, with a special article celebrating the contribution of women to sports medicine. Dr Ruth Highet who has worked at multiple Olympic and Commonwealth games was interviewed in this piece and stated that a career in sports medicine is compatible with a family life, although team travel can be harder once children come along. Furthermore she suggested that an increase in salaried positions could attract more women into the specialty. As such it will be interesting to see how the UK Sports and Exercise Medicine official training scheme may change the gender disparity (<http://www.st3recruitment.org.uk/specialties/sport-exercise-medicine>).

So where do we stand today and how tough is Sports Medicine as a women going to be? At present only 23% of SEM Consultants/Fellows ([http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/sports\\_and\\_exercise\\_medicine.asp](http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/sports_and_exercise_medicine.asp)) on the GMC specialist register for the UK Faculty of Sports and Exercise Medicine (<http://www.fsem.ac.uk/>) are women<sup>1</sup>. It is unclear exactly why this discrepancy exists but it is likely multifactorial. Encouragingly for the future, however, of doctors currently in training on the SEM pathway 39% are female.

Thankfully my 'on calls' are over for now, our contract is being re-negotiated to hopefully limit the disadvantageous aspects towards women, and I personally feel Sports Medicine is ready for us! There may be work to do; however, as long as individuals are being selected based on merit and not gender I hope the male to female ratio will even out as today's juniors become tomorrow's Consultants.

1. *Information obtained from Faculty of Sport and Exercise Medicine UK (personal communication)*

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Thanks Dawn for that very informative piece. Interestingly I just had a discussion with a female colleague who covers a local professional baseball team. She tells that she alone among the team doctors (who are otherwise male) is not allowed into the team locker room and has to take the back door into the training room. Lots of change still needed in the culture.....



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### About sportingjim

I work at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio USA, where I am a specialist in pediatric sports medicine. My academic appointment as an Associate Professor of Pediatrics is through Ohio State University. I am a public health advocate for kids' health and safety. I am also the Emerging Media Editor for the Clinical Journal of Sport Medicine.

