H5 Playing-Related Musculoskeletal Injury Prevention Policy

Introduction

Playing related musculoskeletal injuries in professional orchestral musicians and in conservatoire students are common and have a lifetime prevalence of between 26% and 93% (Zaza, 1998). The severity of these injuries ranges from inconvenient to career ending (Culf, 1998; Zaza, 1998). The majority of these injuries are preventable.

Research has shown that injury prevention strategies in conservatoires can reduce the incidence of such injuries, but have no impact on pre-existing injuries acquired before reaching conservatoires. (Zander, et al, 2010).

This strongly suggests that there is a need for injury prevention awareness in a pre-conservatoire setting, such as here at the school, and it is because of this that this policy has been developed.

Statutory Framework

This policy holds a unique place between the School's Child Protection Policy and the School's Health and Safety Policy and has been placed within the pastoral policies. It has been developed under the following Statutory Framework:

1. 2002 Education Act (section 175) /157 Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2014 **which require Independent schools to safeguard and promote the welfare of Children who are students at the School**.

2. Health & Safety at Work Act (1974) and The Management of Health & Safety Regulations (1999) **which requires staff, students, contractors and visitors:**

- To co-operate on health and safety
- To take care of their own health and safety
- To take responsibility for the health and safety in the areas where they work
- To be aware of the impact of their actions on themselves and on other people.

Risk Factors for Playing-Related Musculoskeletal Injuries

Ongoing monitoring and auditing of physiotherapy notes from the school physiotherapist demonstrate five distinct risk factors for playing-related injury in students.

These are:

- Sudden increase in playing time
- Introduction of new repertoire with a different technical demand
- Posture or position when playing
- Stress
- Growth spurts.

The risk is cumulative, so the more risk factors that co-exist, the greater the likelihood of injury.

Injury Prevention Guidelines

Absolute rules about injury prevention are impossible to produce as there are widespread differences between individuals' physical capacity, and this capacity is not fixed. However general guidelines for injury prevention are useful. To this end the School requires all stakeholders at the School who are directly involved with students' instrument playing, including students, parents, music heads of departments (HODs), visiting music teachers, practice supervisors and boarding house staff:

- To have knowledge of and be actively aware of these five risk factors for playing-related injury
- To use this knowledge to promote safe practice in music education and in the development of the young instrumental musicians at the school.

Specific Care Should Be Taken By Stakeholders to Ensure That Students:

- Increase playing time gradually rather than suddenly
- Are introduced slowly and gradually to new repertoire that has a new or different technical demand
- Are aware of what a neutral posture is. When not playing they should be encouraged to return to a neutral position as often as possible. In this instance 'neutral' refers to returning to a symmetrical position, lengthening the spine, and letting go of shoulder girdle tension
- Are allowed to take time after a growth spurt before suddenly increasing playing time, attempting new repertoire with a different technical demand, or changing to a larger/ heavier instrument
- Acknowledge that stress can increase muscle tension, and seek strategies to reduce muscle tension when stressed, such as by taking part in physical exercise and by doing dynamic stretches before playing, and sustained (or held) counter-stretches after playing.

Sources of Information about Injury Prevention

Information on these risk factors for injury and on injury prevention is provided:

- To new students in their induction session
- To new parents in the induction session
- To new visiting music teachers, in their induction pack and annually from the HoDs
- To practice supervisors in their induction training by the school physiotherapist
- To boarding house staff in their induction training by the school physiotherapist and in their wellbeing folders
- On image based posters throughout the school on noticeboards.

Further information about wellbeing of musicians can be found on the following websites:

British Association of Performing Arts Medicine (BAPAM): www.bapam.org.uk

The Healthy Conservatoires Network: https://healthyconservatoires.org

References

Culf, N. (1998). *Musicians' Injuries - A Guide to their Understanding and Prevention*. Tonbridge Wells, Uk: PARAPRESS LTD.

Zander, M., Spahn, C., & Voltmer, E. (2010). Health Promotion and Prevention in Higher Music Education. Results of a longitudinal study. *Medical Problems of Performing Artists*, *25*(2).

Zaza, C. (1998). Playing-Related Musculo-Skeletal Disorders in Musicians: a Systematic Review of Incidence and Prevalence. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, *158*(8), 1019–1025.

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