

PalmBeachPost Jobs

Jobs in sports medicine include certified fitness trainers and orthopedic surgeons

By Brenda McHugh

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Since 2003, sports-related injuries have constituted 10 percent of all emergency-room visits. That is actually good news...for those interested in a career in sports medicine, of course.

"There are great business opportunities that exist for motivated, experienced, educated and certified professionals in our industries," said Julie Snyder, program director for sports and medical technology at Keiser University in Port St. Lucie.

Sports medicine is a field that developed in the 1970s and has grown into a well-recognized specialty. Jobs include professional fitness trainers and orthopedic surgeons.

Certified trainers can earn up to \$50,000 a year, while physicians are likely to draw a salary in excess of \$200,000, according to the American College of Sports Medicine. And their services are more valuable now than ever, according to Snyder: "One can't pick up the newspaper or look at the Internet without being bombarded by the alarming and sad facts of the poor physical condition of our nation.

"The American way of life has led to a growing need for sports-medicine and fitness professionals. More children are obese, and younger adults are suffering heart attacks and strokes. At the same time, seniors are living longer. These special populations have unique and growing health and fitness needs," Snyder added.

As a result, plenty of opportunities exist for those entering the field. Professionals can choose from a multitude of specialties. Some work with children, others with professional athletes, and many help injured adults. Marketing and research opportunities also are available with athletic companies and colleges.

According to Dr. Ralph "Bud" Curtis, a spokesman for the American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine, "The job can vary with the individual's education, career path and skill level." Sports science, also referred to as "exercise science," is a focused study and application of the principles of physiology, anatomy and psychology as they relate to human movement and physical activity.

People in this field might work at a fitness center, on the football field, in a school, at a hospital or rehabilitation facility, or in a private-practice setting. Career examples include David Harper, an assistant varsity coach of the baseball team at South Fork High School in Stuart. He also is working on an externship to earn his degree in the field.

As a coach with the high school, Harper sometimes talks to athletes before practice to teach safety procedures. Or he might apply bandages or braces as a preventive measure, or evaluate and treat minor injuries.

An extern with Bill Hebson's WorkOut America, Harper described his typical day: "In the morning, we work with individual clients for their personal-training needs. In the afternoon, we often work with athletes, some from high school but also collegiate and sometimes pro athletes, on conditioning and strengthening."

Once he graduates, Harper plans to continue coaching students. Why? "I'm a big part of kids' lives. Some of the kids I work with don't think they are even going to college. We get them into a training regimen, and their health, fitness and everything overall is changed. Some go on to become high school athletes and scholarship-eligible."

Snyder's career path also featured a variety of opportunities. "I was fortunate to catch the initial wave of the fitness boom that began in the 1980s," she explained.

After she earned her master's degree in athletic training and sport health from the University of Miami, she worked in a doctor's office, then a hospital, and then for the marketing department of an athletic-shoe company. After that, Snyder

founded her own company - Fit to Ride - for equestrians. Now she also imparts her wisdom to others as a college professor.

Note: While someone might be able to get their certification without higher education, the most valuable professionals have more-advanced academic training.

Earning an associate's degree takes 18 months, and an internship is science-based. A bachelor's degree might require 36 months of full-time study, but is well worth the effort.

"Sports medicine and fitness technology is an up-and-coming field with tremendous opportunity for graduates," said Snyder. "It is truly a multidimensional career."

So, you want to be a personal trainer?

By Brenda McHugh

Do you have an interesting job? Want to share? To be considered for a question-and-answer feature on our Jobs section, please e-mail Jo Rose at jarose@pbpost.com

Subject: *David Harper - Externing as a personal trainer (will remain employed upon completion of externship)*

Title: *Student - Keiser University, Port St. Lucie campus*

Externship Site: *Bill Hebson's WorkOut America, Stuart*

Question: What does your job entail?

Answer: My job allows me to change people's lives in a physical manner that makes them feel better and improves their quality of life. Whether they want weight loss or muscle gain, I do my best to help people reach their goals through individually designed programs. Currently, I'm with clients from 8 a.m. to noon and from 3 p.m. to sometimes 8 p.m.

Q: How did you get started?

A: I got started through the externship that Keiser University established for me. I have to give Julie Snyder, the sports-medicine and fitness-technology program director, the credit because she placed me with Bill Hebson, the exact person I needed to learn from to be successful.

Q: Describe your initial job search.

A: I was really lucky in this respect because I didn't have to go look for the job. I made the most of my opportunity and proved myself to Hebson. Then I was given a job offer and accepted.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: I like the variety of people I get to train. I have a chance to meet a lot of interesting people, of different ages and with different goals and abilities. Most of my training is geared toward high school and college students. I am heading up sport-specific training, and I really like helping these kids get to the next level, whether it's sports accomplishments or athletic scholarships.

Q: What are some of the challenges?

A: Some challenges can be with elderly clients, as their bodies are more fragile, so you have to structure your workouts around their abilities. It can be difficult because you don't want to use the same routines, but you also don't want to try something new that could cause injury.

Q: What skills are required to perform your job?

A: You have to enjoy people. You have to be a good motivator, physically fit, and really passionate about the science of exercise and fitness training. Also, it is important to be very educated about the body. The knowledge you get from a degree program sets you apart from others and determines your long-term success in the field.

Q: What are the educational and licensing requirements?

A: Actually, all you need is a certification to have a job, but clients are starting to realize the value of degreed trainers vs. those who haven't completed a degree. I feel you should at least earn your associate of science degree in an exercise-science type field and get one of the top certifications (American Council on Exercise, National Strength and Conditioning Association, American College of Sports Medicine) in order to be successful.

Q: What compensation can someone expect to receive annually?

A: This kind of depends on the person and how driven you are to being one of the best trainers. Some trainers make \$30,000 a year, and some celebrity trainers make more than \$100,000. It all depends on how you promote yourself - your skills and abilities; the successful results of your clients; and, most importantly, did your client enjoy themselves, improve their overall wellness and quality of life, and meet their fitness goals under your guidance? Again, you have to be a people person.

Q: What advice would you give to someone looking to pursue this career?

A: Complete the degree and sell yourself.