



Sports Pharmacy in South Africa – need or nonsense?

Carmen Oltmann, PhD

Faculty of Pharmacy, Rhodes University

Correspondence to: Carmen Oltmann, e-mail: c.oltmann@ru.ac.za

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Abstract

More and more people participate in exercise and sport at all levels – from amateur to elite athletes. Regardless of the level, participants may require advice, information and support about health-related issues. Pharmacists are, in my opinion, well placed to play an important role in this.

Community pharmacists are often involved in managing common sports injuries.¹ Athletes may also enquire about supplements, banned substances, doping, and other health-related issues pertaining to sport. In 2013, Mottram and Stuart described this as “the emerging speciality of sports pharmacy”.² To what extent are you, as a practising pharmacist, willing and able to offer this speciality?

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Sports pharmacy for elite athletes is an obvious place for pharmacists to be involved. For example, pharmacy services were designed for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic games during which pharmacists provided safe, efficient and accurate pharmacy services.² The pharmacists dispensed medicines, provided information about medicines to the athletes and medical team members, and were involved in ensuring athletes did not use medicines prohibited by the World Anti-Doping Agency. Long before these events, pharmacists were involved in driving the process of planning, implementing and monitoring the provision of pharmaceutical services.

Why should these services be limited to Olympians, Paralympians, professional and other elite athletes? Couldn't the services be expanded to include non-elite athletes, with pharmacists offering health activities to all athletes, thus augmenting the role of the pharmacist in lifestyle management?

South Africa is unlikely to be hosting the Olympic Games in the near future (it's simply too expensive) but we have many major sporting events such as the Comrades, Two Oceans ultramarathon, Argus cycle race, Iron-man, and others where pharmacists could and should become more involved. For example, could pharmacists be available before, during and after events – to advise athletes? Could pharmacists be working with coaches and athletes? This could be at all levels i.e. school, amateur and professional sports. Athletes in school sports often get their information from coaches, teachers, the internet and/or fellow athletes. Why could pharmacists not play an important role in ensuring correct advice and information is provided?

Given this possible expanded role, is there a need for sports pharmacy to be included in the BPharm curriculum? What about sports pharmacy related CPD? What are your thoughts?

If you have an opinion and would like to share it with me, please email me at c.oltmann@ru.ac.za

References

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I declare that I have no financial or personal relationship(s) which may have inappropriately influenced me in writing this paper.