

Piano teachers' perceptions of risk factors associated with Playing Related Musculoskeletal Disorders (PRMDs) in elite pianists

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Introduction: Playing Related Musculoskeletal Disorders (PRMDs) are a recognised problem in pianists^{1,2} and the field of performing arts medicine has grown rapidly in the last 10 – 15 years. Authors in this field have identified a need for more piano-specific research into PRMDs³. This study explores two elements related to PRMDs: piano teachers' perceptions of risk factors associated with PRMDs in elite (university and professional-level) pianists and pianists' reactions to PRMDs.

Method: Data for this study was derived from the qualitative phase of a larger project⁴. Piano teachers with awareness of PRMDs were recruited from The University of Melbourne Faculty of Music and The Victorian College of the Arts (Melbourne, Australia). One-on-one interviews were conducted, recorded and transcribed. Questioning elicited information regarding piano teachers' perceptions of risk factors and emotional/physical reactions associated with PRMDs in elite pianists. Methodological rigor was enhanced by participant checks and triangulation of data with the literature and data from interviews with pianists and health practitioners. Transcripts were analysed using grounded theory and qualitative content analysis.

Results: Risk factors most strongly associated by piano teachers with PRMDs in elite pianists were: Technique, Relaxation/muscle tension, Teacher, Seat height and Repertoire. Many of these factors have been identified in the musicians' injury literature. Other risk factors in this literature, such as Joint laxity and Number of years playing, were rarely

associated with PRMDs in pianists by piano teachers. Reduced playing capacity and feelings of stress, anxiety and loss of confidence in pianists experiencing PRMDs were described. Results were consistent with data from pianists and health practitioners.

Conclusion: In pianists, some risk factors associated with PRMDs are piano specific. PRMDs can significantly affect pianists' playing abilities and also have a psychological impact. The insights into risk factors have implications for teaching practice and could facilitate the development of preventative strategies.

References

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Biography: Peter Bragge is a pianist, piano teacher and physiotherapist from Melbourne, Australia. He gained his L.T.C.L at the instrument in 1991 and began teaching piano soon after. In 1995 he graduated from The University of Melbourne as a physiotherapist. In 2003 he commenced his PhD investigating Playing Related Musculoskeletal Disorders (PRMDs) in elite (tertiary and professional) pianists. Peter is currently writing up his PhD for submission in early 2006. He maintains a part-time private piano teaching business and is also employed as a tutor at the University of Melbourne School of Physiotherapy.

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