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Practicing prevention in the music schools

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A common misconception is that a career in the Performing Arts is easygoing and effortless when, in fact, it is extremely demanding. Success for a professional musician requires a virtual endless amount of time practicing and studying music. Because of the extremely high level of perfection required to achieve any prestigious position, be it professor of music in a university or a member of a renowned orchestra, the students of the 1990's must be flawless and thus much more demanding of themselves. Unfortunately, this tremendous intensity and pressure is coupled with an increase in the number of musicians inflicted with music-related injuries, the prevalence which has significantly increased over the past 10 years. This increase can be attributed to several factors common to both music students and professional musicians alike. They include lack of knowledge and employment of proper practice techniques, physical education and physical fitness, common predisposing factors related to music-related injuries, and the preventative techniques which could reduce their chance of acquiring music-re-

lated injuries. Although many music conservatories and universities are recognizing this dilemma and are compiling a resource list of local doctors and/or therapists who work with musicians, most institutions have not offered educational solutions. Because of a lack of knowledge and general experience among the majority of music students, a resource list should not be the first and last solution. By recognizing that many young music students are convinced they have invincible qualities, and understanding that the music world is universally stressful, unforgiving, and competitive, the need for educational courses on injury prevention can be immediately appreciated. The invincible young music student often foolishly believes that they can practice endlessly throughout the day and night. Furthermore, these musicians not only fail to take ample amounts of practice breaks, but they also do not believe that this particular regime will cause them physical harm. Unfortunately, the older a musician gets, the harder it is to break improper practice habits and the easier it is for the body to break down after even mild misuse. According to Novak (1992), 'The cumulative demands of repetitive activity, extending into years, has the greatest impact on a musician' (p. 73). Therefore, knowledge of correct practice habits and preventative measures can and should be established early in a musician's career to decrease the odds

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of obtaining a music-related injury later in their profession. From personal experience, it is my opinion that music conservatories, music divisions of universities, and preparatory high schools for the arts should recognize the seriousness of this problem. These schools should offer their students and faculty members seminars, frequent workshops, and most importantly a course taught by doctors and/or therapists who specialize in the field of performing arts. These seminars, workshops, and courses should teach basic human anatomy and physiology and also the components of proper practice habits and techniques, as well as beneficial exercises and stretches for all instrumentalists. Furthermore, musicians should also be made cognizant of the common predisposing factors leading to music-related injuries and the preventative measures they can employ to help diminish their chances of acquiring such an injury.

Unfortunately, musicians will continue to suffer from music-related injuries if they do not practice preventatively. However, it is my hope that through the proposed focus on education, a majority of today's young musicians can be taught how to safeguard themselves against music-related injuries. It is the responsibility of the educational institution to help decrease a musician's chances of having a physically and mentally distressing injury, and supply them the knowledge which they can then pass down to the students of the future.

References

- Novak, C.B. (1992). Physical therapy management of thoracic outlet syndrome in the musician. *J. Hand Ther.* April/June, 73–79.