

Update on the Annual Post-Hire Health Screen for Professional Dancers Dance/USA Taskforce on Dancer Health

Our Mission:

TO maintain the health, safety and well-being of professional dancers

History/Background

- In the winter of 2005, the Dance/USA Managers Council requested that the Taskforce on Dancer Health explore and make recommendations on preventing injury and illness in professional dance.
- The Taskforce is composed of the medical personnel from many of North America's leading dance companies, includes, PTs, ATCs and MDs. Specifically at that time, the Taskforce was asked to pursue the subject of screening.

Summarizing what we...

Are:

- Volunteers
- A group with a narrow focus on professional dancers/companies in North America
- A group that was formed at the request of the Council of Managers for Dance USA
- A group that provide annual reports to Dance USA

Are NOT:

- A dance medicine association
- An educational meeting
- A board of directors
- A research group
- All things to all people

Goals of the Taskforce 2011-2012

- Provide experienced and expert health information & support to professional dance companies regardless of size or budget
- Decrease time loss to injury with early problem recognition & education
- Reduce immediate medical expenses
- Decrease disability insurance cost
- Analyze injury patterns & links
- Support the health & wellness of the individual professional dancer
- Support the health & wellness needs of professional companies large & small

CURRENT Projects:

- Consensus papers
- Increasing exposure & information
- Annual post-hire screening
- Focus on medical history/demographics
- Future initiatives:
 - Paper on navigating the health care system
 - Injury surveillance

Consensus papers:

- Backstage basic first-aid kit for stage managers
- Travel and touring tips
- Vitamin D, Calcium and Iron nutrition
- Recovery techniques to maintain optimal health
- Heat illnesses and dehydration
- Nutritional Guidelines
- Smoking cessation

Now available to companies. Working on having all of them available on line.

www.danceusa.org

Exposure & Information

- Dance USA conference & Exhibit table
 - Committed to sending TF members to the annual conference
- Dance USA website
 - Working on increasing our visibility on line.
 - Established our own website with help from Voice of Dance, but having difficulty with technical aspect
 - TF prefers to remain an arm of Dance/USA and a “Task Force” rather than any independent entity
- Response to dancer health issues in the media
 - Written response to the December article in the NY Times:

The Taskforce on Dancer Health, a group of health care professionals from several leading dance companies, was honored to publically comment on recent mention of dancer weight by a well known dance critic in the NY Times. The critique unprofessionally stated that two principal dancers were overweight rather than focusing on their performance, artistry, musicality or lines. It was our position that commentary of this nature does nothing to educate, inspire, or bring about innovation in the field. Additionally, we fear this criticism aimed at dancers shape or eating habits will be damaging to the decades of good work being done by dance companies and their associated health care teams in promoting healthy, injury free dancers with healthy dietary habits. (Full response available with Dance/USA)
 - Serving as a resource for Dance/USA

- Participation in Dance NYC Town Hall
 - Panel Discussion held May 16, 2011 on Dancers' Bodies: Promoting Wellness
- Executive committee
 - Leadership established with a smaller group, guiding the larger Taskforce to help insure consistency
 - Always available to assist companies and answer questions

Biggest Project thus far: Annual Post-Hire Health Screen for Professional Dancers

Summary of what the “screening is...”

- A quick assessment for “red flags”
- Performed by health care professionals
- A means for company dancers to meet their healthcare team
- A source for individual referrals, recommendations and individualized, preventative exercise programs
- A living document
- Can be supplemented on an individual company basis

What the screening is NOT...

- A comprehensive evaluation
- Meant for students or non-professional dancers
- A research tool

SCREENING TOOL includes:

- A comprehensive health history which asks for allergies, past medical history, past injury history, menstrual status, smoking, mental health, general nutrition and potential substance abuse.
 - RECENTLY updated with the © 2010 Amercian College of Sports Medicine Pre-participation physical history, but tailored for the dance population & our needs.
- A physical assessment which includes:
 - Vital signs, body mass index, fitness testing looking at cardiovascular parameters, hypermobility, flexibility, strength, balance and dance-specific functional movement analysis.
- An individual summary with counseling for recommendations and referrals based on the results. Always includes preventative exercises to address areas of potential risk for injury.
- Opportunity to meet the health care team

Primary purposes of the screening process:

- To detect potentially life threatening or disabling medical or musculoskeletal conditions that may limit a dancer's safe participation

- To detect medical or musculoskeletal conditions that may predispose dancers to injury and/or illness during their season

Secondary purposes of the screening process:

- To determine general health
- To assess fitness level
- To counsel the dancers by recommending interventions and referrals
- To utilize a standardized screening tool and protocols
- TO introduce new dancers to the health care team

Factors significant to the Taskforce:

- Privacy & Confidentiality
 - ESSENTIAL
 - In some cases, management needed to be educated on the law and that while bearing the cost of this program, they could have absolutely NO access to the information (NOT workman's comp)
- Assessing the whole dancer
 - Health risks in professional dance are not limited to physical injury
 - Helpful for the practitioners to have past medical history, allergies, medications in the event of an emergency
 - Screen includes four areas: physical, emotional, nutritional & general health assessments
- Full company participation
 - Success depends on broad participation and support from the leadership in a company
 - Needs to be a routine part of company life
- AGMA participation
 - Taskforce has had AGMA at meetings to provide input & guidance
 - Helped develop screen
 - AGMA representatives have given helpful dancer feedback after screenings
 - This program has the full support of AGMA with the dancers
- Timing
 - POST-HIRE to assure all parties that this program has no relation to employment status
 - Early in the season to allow time for corrective intervention & referrals as needed
- Universal screen
 - Unanimous agreement by the Taskforce that there would be one standardized tool for all types of companies
 - Based on the assumptions that there are core issues of functional movement common to all types of dance & that there are core issues of health common to all types of people
 - Developed for professional dancers NOT for schools

- Cost/Financial support from the company
 - Needs to be PAID work time for the dancers
 - Extra hours & costs for the medical teams should be paid by the companies
 - In practice: dancer cost is absorbed into salaries & only real cost is reimbursement of time for the medical teams (like a costume fitting)

THE PILOT Program

- In 2006-2007, four companies participated in A PILOT of the screening tool and process: Alvin Ailey Dance Theater, Boston Ballet, Houston Ballet and Pittsburgh Ballet Theater
- A survey was conducted and feedback was gathered from the dancers, AGMA, and the health care practitioners
- The screening form and guidelines were revised based on the information gathered and what individual companies felt was important

Companies USING the screen in the 2011-2012 season

- Currently 30 companies are using the screen annually
- Combination of large and small companies
- Have done individual screens for freelance dancers at Harkness Center for Dance Injuries in conjunction with Dance/NYC

Description of information collected:

- Three levels of information
- A lot of potential and benefit within each level

Level One

- Counseling the individual dancer
 - RECOMMENDATIONS
 - Summary area
 - Exercises
 - Referrals recommended can include:
 - Primary care physician
 - Orthopedic/Sports Medicine physicians
 - Nutritionist
 - Physical Therapist
 - Sports Psychologist
 - OB/GYN
 - Dentist
- Important to note that every year many companies uncovered potentially life threatening conditions in their dancers (Ex: Undetected significant hypertension or potential eating disorders or history of congenital heart disease)

Level Two:

- Analyzing group trends within an individual company
- Summary report presented to the company helps look at the overall health of the company as a whole (Ex: percentage of smokers or CV fitness level)
- Programs can then be implemented to affect change within the company

Examples of programs companies have implemented based on the screen

- Dancers with low body mass index (BMI) were referred for further assessment and nutritional counseling because while thin is the aesthetic for dance and ballet in particular, we know that very low BMIs are associated with poor bone health and longer healing times.
- High Beighton hypermobility scores: Hypermobility puts dancers at higher risk for more serious injuries so those dancers are referred for strengthening and proprioceptive training
- Step test – Cardiovascular conditioning/preseason boot camp implemented

Level Three

- Combining the information among companies
 - Exciting, complicated – Every company owns their own data, but there is enormous potential. Can allow for huge advances in understanding intrinsic factors that contribute to injury
 - Completely voluntary on the part of the practitioner and the company
- Need IRB approval & informed consent from individual dancers
 - Currently have multi-center participation with Children's Hospital, Boston/Harvard Medical to have an umbrella protocol

GOAL for 2011-2012

- Increase company participation with the history section of the screen.
- Updated demographics/history section to the screen – makes the information easier to track and compile
- Completed by the dancer individually in advance of the physical assessment
- Can be done independently without the physical assessment
 - Not all companies have the access or the ability to perform full screenings.

Study potential:

- Will give us all information about professional dancers that dance medicine has never been able to gather before.
- Most recent studies are from 1992 & 1984:

A profile of the musculoskeletal characteristics of elite professional ballet dancers. Hamilton WG, Hamilton LH, Marshall P, et. al. *Am J Sports Med* 1992; 20(3):267-73.

Physiologic profiles of female professional ballerinas.
Micheli L, Gillespie W, Walaszek A. *Clin Sports Med* 1984; 3(1):199-209.

Data Storage:

Web-based database: The Dancer Wellness Project

- Must be covered by umbrella IRB or an approved independent IRB
- ALL completely de-identified data & must have written consent from individual dancers
- Each company owns its OWN data, but data can be combined with mutual agreement between companies
- All secure and password protected

www.dancerwellnessproject.com

Next Steps:

- Encourage increased participation & at the very least encourage companies to utilize history section of the screen
- Evaluate and analyze information collected
 - Continue to establish normative data for the professional dancer
- Revise screen tool as needed
 - Analyze what has been collected & decide if it is useful & if revisions need to be made to the process or the forms. (Ex: TIME is always an issue)
- Implement intervention programs
- Continue to create consensus papers
 - Currently working on “Navigating the US health care system”
- Establish an injury tracking system
 - Screen allows for intrinsic factors to be identified: How do these factors affect injuries within a company? How do they affect injuries across companies with differing extrinsic factors?
- Continue to support smaller companies & individual dancers

THANK YOU

- Acknowledgements:
 - Dance/NYC for their support & as hosts for our meetings, especially Lacy Althouse

Nancy Kadel, MD
Heather Southwick, PT
Heather Herod Cole, PT
Annual Dance USA conference
Chicago July 2011

- Amy Fitterer who have been very supportive to the TF and directs us to the staff and members who can assist us as we continue to grow and evolve
- Liason to Dance/USA: Matthew Keefe
 - He has regularly attended our TF meetings
 - His input, advice and support have been invaluable

Contact information

www.danceusa.org

Taskforce on Dancer Health

Chair: Nancy Kadel, MD nancykadelmd@gmail.com

Vice Chair: Heather Southwick, PT hsouthwick@bostonballet.org

Secretary/Treasurer: Heather Herod Cole, PT pthsquared44@yahoo.com