

The Student Advocate Scheme

Improving health education and support for musicians

Naomi Norton, University of Leeds and RNCM

naomi_norton_88@hotmail.co.uk

1. Introduction

- A high frequency of tertiary-level **student musicians** have **performance-related problems (PRPs)** (Kreutz, Ginsborg & Williamson, 2008; Spahn et al., 2004). If correct education and support are provided it is possible to prevent the development of most PRPs (Wynn Parry, 2003).
- Some **conservatoires** provide health education and support (Kreutz et al., 2008; Williamson et al., 2012) however **university musicians** are currently less supported.
- A health-promoting environment should 'maintain the health and wellbeing' of members, 'integrate understanding of and commitment to health' and 'develop its role as a key influence for health' by providing resources and promoting advocacy (Tsouros et al., 1998, p. 29).
- In order to provide **appropriate suggestions for the improvement** of health, education and support in a particular environment it is necessary to **understand the current situation** in that environment.

Research Aims

- Investigate the current situation regarding health education and support for university musicians.
- Develop a health promotion scheme that will improve health education and support for university musicians based on research results.

2. Method

Participants: A survey was conducted with **282** members (203 female, 78 male, 1 unknown; mean age - 19.8, SD - 1.92) of the Leeds University Union Music Society. The society has 8 ensembles (4 auditioned) comprising **music students** (42% of sample) and **non-music students** (58% of sample) from **all university year groups** (although 68% of sample were 1st or 2nd years). All major instrument families were represented; woodwind (32%), strings (23%), voice (18%), piano/percussion (17%) and brass (8%).

Procedure: The researcher developed a survey based on existing literature and research models. There were four survey sections (demographic data, performance-related problems, coping strategies and engagement with health). Distribution took place during ensemble rehearsals in September 2011. Participants gave **fully informed consent** and had up to 15 minutes to complete the survey. **Contact details** for the researcher and a health charity (BAPAM) were provided.

Analysis: Descriptive statistics and Pearson's chi-square test were used to analyse categorical data and non-parametric tests were used to analyse scale data.

3. Survey Results

Performance-Related Problems

- Nearly 60% (N=162) of participants had a **history of PRPs**, 22% (N=61) were **currently experiencing physical pain** and 14% (N=40) had been experiencing pain for **at least 3 months**.
- 134 participants had experienced **Music Performance Anxiety (MPA)** and the average intensity of MPA symptoms was 3.29 (SD = 1.22) when rated from 1 'less intense' to 5 'more intense'.
- Physical pain was **most prevalent in the hands and/or wrists** followed by **upper and/or lower back**. Location of pain was significantly associated with instrument specialism (see Figure 1).

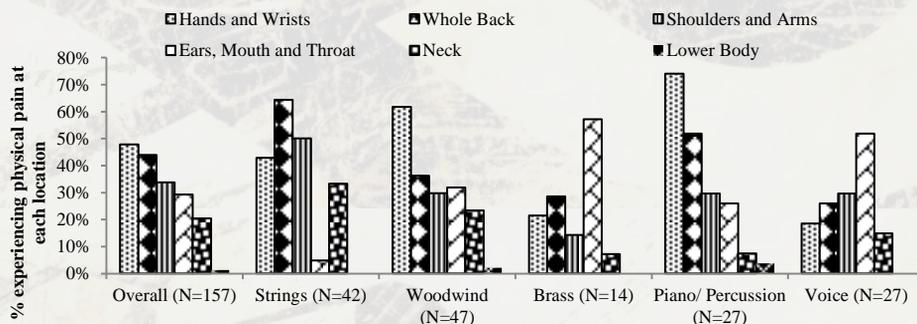


Figure 1: Location of Physical Pain in Different Instrument Families

Engagement with Health Education and Support

- Most participants (N = 244) **would seek advice** if they experienced a PRP, mainly from their **instrumental/vocal teacher or friend/family member** (N = 133). Participants would be **most comfortable discussing PRPs** with a friend, instrumental/vocal teacher or another injured musician.
- Only 70 participants had **received health education prior to the study**. 122 participants were **interested in taking part in health education in the future**.
- Less than a quarter of participants (N = 66) had **heard of the health charity BAPAM**; knowledge was gained primarily from friends and lecturers.

4. Survey Implications

- The introduction of a health promotion scheme for university musicians is justified.
- Student musicians (especially those who have experienced PRPs) may make effective health promotion advocates.
- A health promotion scheme should provide convenient access to education and support.
- Education and support provided by a health promotion scheme should be provided by discipline-specific experts and tailored to instrumental specialism.

5. The Student Advocate Scheme

Collaboration between **Naomi Norton** and **The British Association for Performing Arts Medicine (BAPAM)** led to the introduction of the **Student Advocate Scheme (SAS)** at the University of Leeds in 2011/12.

Taking into account the survey implications generated by this research Naomi Norton (at the time, a student musician with a history of PRPs) implemented the following initiatives to **improve health education and support**:

- ✓ Regular free clinics in the music department with a medical professional and access to alternative clinics outside the department.
- ✓ Free health education lectures delivered by health professionals.
- ✓ Improved library resources including access to appropriate books and journals.
- ✓ Promotion of BAPAM and other sources of education and support through distribution of resources, development of a webpage, use of social media and discussion with students and staff.

Informal feedback from students and staff suggests that the SAS has **successfully promoted health and wellbeing in a university environment**.

Preliminary analysis of an annual review suggests that student musicians at Leeds are now more **aware of health support**, more **inclined to consult BAPAM** and more likely to have **received health education**.

Following the success of the scheme at Leeds the SAS is currently being **extended to include other UK establishments** with the aim of creating a **network of advocates**.

References can be found on the supplementary sheet provided below.