A Beginner's Guide to Pediatric Exercise Organizations

Question: What do NASPEM, AAP, AAHPERD, PCPFS, ACSM, and EGPWP have in common? Answer: They are among the burgeoning number of organizations devoting energies to children and exercise, ranging from scientific research to the organization of medical care for athletes to the promotion of healthy exercise habits early in life. It's a growth that can only be viewed positively as reflecting the vitality of this field and its relevance to the health and well-being of the pediatric population.

Some of these organizations are brand new, others are older and well established. They all need committed people to grow and flourish, and to that end they deserve our support and attention. So, in the spirit of you-can't-tell-the-players-without-a-program, the following is presented as a pocket guide to who's who and what's what in pediatric exercise organizations.

The European Group for Pediatric Work Physiology is among the oldest organizations that have focused on research in the field of children and exercise. The group was formed in the late 1960s by Drs. Joseph Rutenfranz, Oded Bar-Or, Claus Thoren, and others as a close-knit association of individuals involved in pediatric exercise research in Europe. The group has met every 2 years, typically in a scenic yet sequestered location, to present and discuss topics on children and exercise.

The importance of these meetings to the field has become so widely recognized that they now attract participants from around the globe. At the most recent meeting in Clermont-Ferrand, France, in 1991, directors Jean Coudert and Emmanuel Van Praagh noted in the program's introduction that "looking at the list of participants, you may observe that our symposium tends to displace its center of gravity from Northern to Southern Europe and also over the Atlantic Ocean, the Group having created links with Northern and Southern American colleagues." They could have added that Japanese and Australian research programs were also represented.

The North American Society for Pediatric Exercise Medicine was formed in 1985 as the parallel organization to the European Group on this side of the Atlantic. A group of pediatric cardiologists (Drs. Reggie Washington, Bruce Alpert, Bob Wolfe, Fred James, and Frank Galioto) were instrumental in its formation. NASPEM has met yearly at varying locations in the United States since then, with didactic lectures, abstract presentations, and workshops focusing mainly on exercise physiology, therapeutic and rehabilitative uses of exercise, and exercise in special populations.

Like the European group, NASPEM has attracted participants well beyond its geographical mandate. The most recent meeting in 1992 in Miami Beach included European, South American, and Australian presenters. Current officers
of NASPEM are Dr. Frank Galioto, President; Dr. Thomas Rowland, President-Elect; and Dr. Pat Nixon, Secretary-Treasurer.

Those wishing to become involved in either of these organizations will have a golden opportunity this fall when the two groups hold their first joint meeting in Alliston, Ontario, north of Toronto. Indeed, the critical mass of pediatric exercise scientists attending this conference September 18–22 will be great enough to make attendance a must. Under the direction of Drs. Oded Bar-Or and Joe Blimkie, the meeting will focus on the theme “From Theory to Practice.” Twelve to 15 invited speakers will present didactic state-of-the-art reviews and then conduct workshops in which practical aspects of their subject will be discussed. Topics of symposia will include bone metabolism, physical activity, and growth; endocrine aspects of pediatric exercise medicine; and nutrition, growth, and exercise. There will also be a free communication and poster session for the presentation of abstracts.

The NASPEM–EGPWP joint meeting is being organized by the Department of Physical Education at McMaster University and the Children’s Exercise and Nutrition Centre, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year. For further information on the conference, contact the Centre at McMaster University; Eve1 Building, 4th floor; P.O. Box 2000, Station A; Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L8N 3Z5; telephone 416/521-2100, ext. 7615.

The American College of Sports Medicine has recently responded to a perceived need by recognizing special interest groups within its organizational structure. As a result of the initiative of Dr. Tim Ryschon, an interest group, or forum, on pediatric exercise physiology has been created which will meet yearly at the ACSM annual meeting. ACSM will provide meeting space and time (this year in Seattle on June 3) for the forum, which will involve a somewhat formal discussion as well as organization of efforts for including pediatric related topics in the general meeting program. Those wishing more information can contact Dr. Ryschon at the National Institute of Health, Laboratory for Cardiac Energetics; Building 1 Room B3-07; Bethesda, MD 20892; telephone 301/496-8041.

Last year ACSM President Bob Cantu also approved the formation of an ad hoc committee on pediatric exercise. The purpose of this group will be to increase ACSM’s role in the promotion of fitness, exercise, and sports in children. Dr. Russell Pate will serve as chairman.

The year 1992 also witnessed the first educational program of the new Interim Forum on Sports Medicine and Fitness of the American Academy of Pediatrics. The group, currently chaired by Dr. Mike Nelson, is expecting to receive recognition as a section of the AAP in the near future. At the present time, only fellows of the AAP (i.e., physicians) qualify for membership, but nonphysicians may become eligible after achieving section status. Currently the activity of the group involves principally the presentation of an educational program at the fall meeting of the AAP. Last autumn’s conference in San Francisco focused on lower extremity injuries; this fall’s meeting will include not only orthopedic sports medicine but also topics related to health and fitness in children. For further information you can contact Jim Cuoto, the section coordinator, at 800/433-9016, ext. 7658.

Certainly, many other groups have contributed extensively to the field of children and exercise. The American Alliance for Health, Physical Education,
Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD) has focused primarily on research and programmatic development of physical education for children. The President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports has spearheaded efforts to highlight the need for improving exercise habits and fitness in the pediatric age group. The American Heart Association has provided guidelines for exercise testing in children, and the National Strength and Conditioning Association has created recommendations for strength training in prepubertal individuals.

While the growing number of groups addressing issues on children and exercise is exciting, one might sound (softly) a cautionary note. For the insidious affliction *organizationosis fulminans*, long dreaded in politics, business, and, yes, even science, is best avoided. Small groups working independently with different, perhaps sometimes conflicting, agendas have the potential of impeding rather than promoting progress in the field of pediatric exercise. Cooperative efforts, on the other hand, can serve as an energizing stimulus to continued growth in this exciting field.

*Thomas W. Rowland, M.D.*
*Editor*