

II. HEALTH AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

4. Towards efficient risk prevention policies

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Why are risk and injury prevention models not working? Most prevention models are designed top-to-bottom and stand a long way from the musician, they seem derived from models used in the industrial world.

Moreover, many of these prevention interventions did not work in the orchestra setting, were given in the free time, not compulsory and suffered from a high attrition rate.

You have to know the questions and problems of the performers to give a possible solution which connects to their world and personalities. In my experience of professional oboist and union chairman, colleagues had trouble finding the right doctor, diagnosis and treatment of their injuries. There was simply no information on occupational risks, injuries or prevention available.

As a spin-off of the 1997 Conference "Health and the musician" in York, I was one of the initiators and the motor behind the "Musicians' Healthcare Foundation". Its main goal was to develop a network of doctors and therapists, specialized in the treatment of musicians as well as providing the much needed information on occupational injuries of musicians.

We decided to tackle the lack of trustworthy information and I designed and developed a website for instrumentalists and vocalists: www.muzeikenzorg.nl.

Its objective is the prevention and reduction of (occupational) injuries of musicians, reduction of absenteeism and the saving of professional skills.

Muzeikenzorg.nl gives answer to the following questions:

- What injury do I have?
- What injuries are linked to my instrument / voice?
- What causes this injury?
- Who is specialized in the treatment of my / this injury and where do I find him / her?
- What treatment(s) are possible and effective?
- What can I do to prevent this injury?

Since the start in 2003, it is growing into a knowledge centre for the performing arts.

Recently, the site was completely rebuild, improved and enlarged; we have 1500 unique visitors every month and regular questions via mail or telephone. I'm still the consultant and webmaster behind the site. It is not possible to measure the preventive effect of this site, but it gets regular praise from the practitioners and is mentioned in the health and safety brochures.

My dream is to get support to develop this website to an independent knowledge centre for performing arts, a site with an international database of all doctors and therapists, specialized in performing arts medicine.

Presented together with relevant scientific research literature, made comprehensible for performers / musicians, a newsletter and interesting articles. Thus breaking the vicious circle of ill-informed teachers, students, professional musicians, teachers etc., and solving partially this international problem of the "Missing Information-link" between medical research, doctors and musicians.

As board member of the Dutch "Health and Safety in the Performing Arts Foundation", I was commissioned to do a review of the literature on health risks and occupational diseases of musicians and the prevention possibilities. ("Serious Foul Play"). Goal of this review was the development of preventive interventions for the Dutch Orchestras. The resulting extensive study,

covering 153 titles, is used by therapists and medical students. Working on the review broadened my knowledge on the (im-) possibilities of the existing prevention models. It confirmed the chosen way, regarding the role of accessible information on prevention. It also did put me on the trail of stress and heavy psychosocial workload as the underlying cause of many playing related musculoskeletal diseases.

Several researchers proved the correlation between work-related stress and the higher muscle tonus of the supporting system, a causative factor in the development of CANS. This stress-relation is often mentioned in the sidelines of the research on playing-related musculoskeletal disorders.

Furthermore, studies show that high psychosocial load had more influence than the physical workload on the possible development of CANS. In my opinion, attention to this relation should be part of any prevention model.

I'm looking forward for the exchange of views and conclude with a couple of statements for you to comment on.

- Giving priority to diminish the psychosocial overload seems the most effective way to prevention of physical and psychical problems.
- Creating a solid bottom for prevention-awareness through information and education is an absolute condition for progress in this field.
- The conductor is an important factor in the range of stressors. Without attention to his role in the overload issue, there is no solution possible. He has to take part in the health and safety discussion.
- I have the impression that the orchestra-management generally is not aware of the extend of physical and psychical problems of their musicians and the long-term consequences. Studies show the musician's habit of playing too long with an injury and not informing the management or anybody else.

As long as the employee is not reported ill, he or she is healthy, thus giving the management a false image of the state of health of the orchestra.

