

Bound by Tradition – 100 Years of Organized Sports Medicine in Germany

Tradition verpflichtet – 100 Jahre organisierte Sportmedizin

The German and international organized sports medicine is celebrating its hundredth anniversary this year – a good cause to look back on its history and results.

Though the terms “Sportarzt” and “Sportmedizin” were not used in German usage before the last century their area of concern and their issues are among the oldest in medicine at all. Connections between medicine and physical activity can be proved since ancient history. Today the postulate of Hippocrates of Kos (460-370 B.C.) is more relevant than ever:

“All functional parts of the body will do well, stay healthy and age more slowly if moderate demands are made on them. In passivity, however, they age faster and are prone to diseases.”

It can also be proved that the contemporary Greek medicine of the time was as closely linked to the training and competitions of ancient athletes as modern sports medicine is to present-day athletes.

It was not before the 17th and 18th centuries that far-sighted physicians and scientists referred to this wealth of ancient knowledge again, which at last became the subject of scientific research. In its efforts to promote prevention, therapy and rehabilitation, physicians found permanent allies in the fast developing gymnastics- and sports movements and after the revival of the Olympic Games starting 1894.

In 1912 well-known German physicians founded the “Deutsches Reichskomitee für die wissenschaftliche Erforschung des Sportes und der Leibesübungen” (German Reichscomittee for the scientific research of sports and physical exercise) at Oberhof/Thuringia. This was the first national organization world-wide of sports medicine, then still called sports science. The foundation of further sports medical organisations in other countries followed only decades later.

In the context of the founding of the world association of sports medicine, the Association Internationale Medico Sportive (AIMS; now FIMS), in 1928, the French representative André Latarjet, later president of the FIMS, acknowledged Germany as the “Pioneering Country of Sports Medicine”. When the 50th anniversary of the re-foundation of the German Association of Sports Medicine was celebrated in Hannover in 2000, the then president of the FIMS Eduardo H. de Rose (Brasil) said that Germany meant the same for sports medicine as Greece did for the Olympic Games.

Hollmann’s definition of sports medicine of 1958 was officially adopted by the International Federation of Sports Medicine (Fédération Internationale de Médecine du Sport - FIMS) in 1977:

“Sports medicine embodies theoretical and practical medicine which examines the influence of exercise, training and sports, as well as the lack of exercise, on healthy and unhealthy people of all ages to produce results that are conclusive to prevention, therapy and rehabilitation as well as beneficial for the athlete himself”

Hardly any other medical field has attracted the permanent attention of politics like the German sports medicine. Sports and with it sports medicine have always been in the focus of attention and

promotion on the part of the political government of the day. The Kaiserreich was interested in public health and fitness for military service, the Weimar republic aimed at physical training and the totalitarian regimes in Germany wanted to gain higher recognition with the help of successes in sports.

With regard to the 100th anniversary of the founding of the “Deutsche Reichskomitee für die Förderung des Sportes und der Leibesübungen”, the predecessor of the DGSP, a team dealing with the “history of sports medicine” was set up in 2006. It was to create, among others, a commemorative publication, to issue a special stamp and to publish historical articles in “Deutsche Zeitschrift für Sportmedizin” in the jubilee year. Numerous entries and illustrations on sports medical topics as well as national and international sports medical associations and biographies of renowned sports physicians were entered into the internet encyclopedia WIKIPEDIA and entries already published were supplemented or corrected. In the following issues of our journal abridged versions of articles on the history of sports medicine will also be published.



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