

IN PRACTICE

AN ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Jennifer Dodge, APAM, is the founder of The Office Athlete—a physiotherapy practice focused on offering adaptable services in a range of different workplace environments. Considering the world of corporate health and fitness, she speaks with *InMotion* about her experiences engaging with this unique sphere of care.

The Office Athlete was founded in 2012. What was the original premise behind its construction?

The concept actually came to me while I was working and waiting for a patient. I was about one month into the life of a physiotherapy graduate and had been working in a Sydney-based sports medicine practice and as the on-site physiotherapist at Qantas. I started to notice a trend in some of the athletic injuries coming in the door in the lead up to various corporate events as well as the common ‘at-desk’ pains and strains.

While it is great to see more and more office spaces encouraging their staff to take part in corporate events, I find it surprising that this morale-boosting initiative isn’t being supported with the basic injury prevention strategies that physiotherapists live and breathe each day.

I didn’t want to see a trend of disheartened and injured first-timers, so I saw an opportunity to enhance their experience even more by putting together tailored physiotherapy injury prevention seminars, on-site physiotherapy services, and warm-up and training programs for various events.

The Office Athlete offers services in a number of niche areas. How do you ensure that your business is offering best practice across the spectrum of services?

The joy of being a physiotherapist means you can be creative, spot any gaps you see in the market and adapt your treatment methods to the evolving employee work styles and workspace functions. However, I am certainly no superhero, so as The Office Athlete has expanded, so have our services. I have teamed up with Sydney-based clinical psychologist Alysha Casey and we have put together



a bespoke Employee Assistance Program (EAP) offering a wide range of services to go with our mission of total corporate health solutions.

What is the range of workplaces and worksites that you have worked with? What are the complexities and difficulties that you have encountered when providing services in such a broad range of settings?

I have had the pleasure of designing ergonomic programs and providing on-site physiotherapy for workplaces such as Nespresso, Super Rugby, Newington College, The Australian Egg Corporation Ltd and Qantas, just to name a few.

The complexities that come with this work mainly revolve around the fact that there aren’t enough hours in the day to pursue all the ideas and suggestions I have when I am in a particular setting. In order for employees to get the most out of their consult, the most productive way for me to face this challenge is through the development of a structured and prioritised treatment approach.

I see the broad range of settings as an advantage. I am able to remain creative with my physiotherapy style and adapt my problem-solving and treatment techniques to a range of environments.

A particular area of interest is the Office Athlete’s work in relation to corporate event training. What does this involve?

The rise in corporate event training is a movement The Office Athlete strongly supports. What I have put together is a range of educational seminars and workshops for the various running festivals, adventure races, and charity events and swims that corporate settings are routinely involved with. We focus on a break-down of the event, what to expect for the first-timers, information on common injuries and training mistakes and provide programs with warm-up, cool-down and stretching education.

In any organisation there is bound to be a range of varying fitness levels and differences in health status amongst employees. How do you address this?

I like to remind my patients that if you have a body, you’re an athlete. My initial questionnaire and history with an employee helps to paint a picture of their presenting injuries and overall health status. I use this information to map out my approach to their current physical status and goals with a tailored treatment plan. This is easily done in a one-on-one scenario; however, in a seminar and workshop environment, I ensure all ranges of physical fitness levels are addressed and make sure that any individuals I may be concerned about book a follow-up appointment with me.