

# dance

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**Dancing through austerity**

# A dancer's view on the HDP and Royal Society of Medicine injury prevention conference

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Event: HDP and Royal Society of Medicine conference 2011  
Pictured: Conference participants  
Photographer: Sally Brooker

With 80% of dancers suffering an injury yearly which affects their ability to dance, the subject came under the spotlight at a major conference held at the Royal Society of Medicine in conjunction with Dance UK in April this year.

*From Injury to Performance: Lessons to share in dance and sports*, brought together leading doctors, surgeons and research consultants from across the UK to discuss the ways in which the two fields can exchange knowledge to both effectively reduce the incidence of injury and increase the rate at which performers and athletes recover when injuries have been sustained.

New models of thinking were put forward by the sports world which has made great progress in risk-management based on the previous lessons learnt from industry. Coming from a corporate background, Dr Colin Fuller, Research Consultant for the Fifa Medical Assessment and Research Centre explained that if the risks were as high in industry as they are in sports and dance, *'industry would be closed down.'* He also highlighted the need for large-scale epidemiological research and a consensus on the way in which injuries are recorded in order to more accurately identify the main causes of injury.

Nick Allen, Clinical Director, Jerwood Centre for the Prevention and Treatment of Dance Injuries provided evidence to support the implementation of rigorous screening and injury data collection, announcing that injuries have been halved at Birmingham Royal Ballet (BRB) since the new programmes were introduced. He went on to explain the new approaches to fitness promoted at BRB where particular emphasis is placed upon readdressing the disparity between the dancers'

technical faculty and their overall fitness levels (which were deemed to be much lower than that of an elite athlete). Mr Allen clarified that the technical superiority upon which dancers rely, is a superficial asset when it comes to injury prevention; if a rugby player makes a technical mistake, this is compensated for by the generally robust levels of fitness and potential injuries are often averted, however, a technical mistake for the dancer can prove much more detrimental, with low levels of fitness, the opportunity for avoidance is compromised and the risk of injury increased.

Britt Tajet-Foxell, Consultant Psychologist to The Royal Ballet who regularly treats Olympic athletes as well as dancers, spoke of the effects of injury on the muscle memory likening the symptoms to those of post traumatic stress. She pinpointed the psychological footprint left behind long after the actual injury had healed, whereby the performer/athlete must also overcome the residual apprehension and anticipation of the injury in order to regain optimum performance.

Nathan Lewis, Senior Performance Nutritionist for the English Institute of Sport, deplored restrictive diets, holding them responsible for the increased risk of stress fractures, higher levels of body fat, damage to the reproductive system and a compromised healing process.

*'The problem comes when we work in isolation'* explained Orthopedic surgeon, Dr Chimney Gupte. Exchange of knowledge was the aim of the day, now we must put the lessons shared into practice. ■