

CAREERS



Role model: Richard Smith

The consultant in rheumatology, musculoskeletal, and sports medicine, talks to **Helen Jones** about working as official doctor for the World's Strongest Man competition

Helen Jones

London, UK

Richard Smith is a self confessed sports fanatic whose passion has shaped his career. “I love all sports from elite level to watching my son play football on a Sunday morning,” he says. “I played rugby and football and rowed at university and now my commute to Salisbury District Hospital is a 10 mile cross country bike ride, come rain or shine.”

As a medical student at St Mary's Hospital in London, Smith sat in on a clinic with a rheumatology consultant who inspired him and brought the specialty to life. “His patients loved him, and I wanted to be like him,” he says.

As well as focusing on rheumatology, Smith opted to do an intercalated BSc looking at the effects of exercise on bone mineral density among athletes. “I got the bug and wanted to work with elite athletes and combine that with rheumatology,” he says. A diploma in sports and exercise medicine at the University of Bath followed, as well as time spent at the New South Wales Institute of Sports Medicine in Sydney.

In 2003, he was approached by a senior physiotherapist at Middlesex County Cricket Club to work on the TV show *Superstars* where elite athletes from different sports competed against each other. “It was a case of being in the right place at the right time,” he says. He was then invited to be the official doctor to the annual World's Strongest Man competition.

“The competition takes about two weeks a year and I have to deal with a unique set of injuries,” Smith says. “Tendon ruptures are the most common. Very few strongmen haven't had their biceps ruptured—it's an occupational hazard. They are unbelievable athletes doing unbelievable things.”

During the competition, Smith works alongside a sports physiotherapist and a masseur. “We learn together and on the job,” he says. “One of the most valuable lessons I've learnt is to bring my own automated external defibrillator because the one I was provided with on my first trip to La Manga only spoke in Spanish.”

Smith also visits Port Stanley in the Falklands for two weeks every year to run rheumatology clinics and educate GPs about rheumatology. “The hospital there is incredibly welcoming, and I work with a great team and very stoical patients,” he says. “I've trained a fantastic nurse in rheumatology who has developed a wealth of experience. She looks after my patients when I'm not there. If necessary, they can be flown by the Royal Air Force Airbridge to Salisbury for treatment.”

Smith admits that he wouldn't be able to fit in all this work without a supportive team. “I'm very lucky to be surrounded by great people in Salisbury. Our rheumatology department is like a big family and everyone, from the secretaries to nurses and doctors, works really well together,” he says.

“It's the same with the sporting events and the Falklands—it's great teamwork. I also couldn't do it without my amazingly supportive family.”

Nominated by Salema Khalid

Richard Smith is someone who inspires. He has a great wealth of knowledge and empathy in equal measure. Having worked with him as a registrar, I've seen the effort and care he puts into his patient interactions. It's no wonder that they love him and come from far and wide to have a consultation with him.

As a mentor, he is extremely supportive. He not only helps with research and encouraging trainees to submit papers to conferences and academic meetings, he also helps guide their careers. He uses every opportunity when teaching, not only to improve our knowledge, but our communication skills and compassion.

Salema Khalid is a rheumatology registrar at Salisbury District Hospital.

Richard Smith will be delivering sessions on rheumatology and hand and elbow pain at BMJ Live on 4-5 October 2019 at the Olympia Conference Centre in London. Register online at: <https://live.bmj.com>

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