

Military Bands as a Population for Studying Musicians' Health

To the Editor—The largest employer of full-time musicians in the United States is the Department of Defense. There are, within the Department, four separate full-time band programs (Army, Air Force, Marines, and Navy), of which the Army is by far the largest. Not only are these musicians employed full-time, but they have completely free health care and a uniform, electronic, world-wide health record that follows them for the length of their careers. They also have to adhere to the physical fitness standards of their services, including both height and weight standards and biannual physical fitness tests; in the Army, the latter includes push-ups, sit-ups, and 2-mile runs every 6 months.

It has always occurred to me that this population is uniquely suited to the sort of study that the Editorial in the September issue describes.¹ Military people are pre-screened and start out healthier than the average population. They also are trained to answer questionnaires and can be invited to participate in studies probably more easily than other musicians, who might reasonably fear being labeled as injured or otherwise compromised in other settings—as I have

personally observed when I was actively practicing performing arts medicine. The only disadvantage that I see to studying them is that the largest instrumental groups in most performing arts medicine surveys, strings and keyboard players, are under-represented in this sample, which instead emphasizes wind, brass, and percussion. But even string players are present, particularly in the Marine and Army string programs here in Washington, DC, which incidentally probably do the finest free concerts in the country.

I would be happy to discuss this group with anyone interested in studying their health. This could easily be marketed to the Department of Defense as a potential force multiplier.

JONATHAN NEWMARK, MD
Colonel, US Army Medical Corps
Falls Church, VA
jonathan.newmark@jpeocbd.osd.mil

1. Manchester R: Measuring the health of performing artists [editorial]. *Med Probl Perform Art* 2008;23:91-92.

The opinions expressed herein are solely those of the author and not necessarily those of the Joint Program Executive Office for Chemical/Biological Defense, the Department of the Army, or the Department of Defense.