



Meet the EIM Leader



Name:

Prof. Christa Janse van Rensburg

Background:

I completed my undergraduate studies in medicine at the University of Pretoria in 1990 (cum laude). With a strong interest in the musculoskeletal aspects of the human body and a belief in the value of exercise in supporting good health, I did my MSc in Sports Medicine and my studies to specialize as a rheumatologist simultaneously. Following my appointment as senior lecturer at the Section Sports Medicine (SSM) in 1999, I was appointed as Head of Department in 2000.

Our primary function at the SSM is the post-graduate training of medical doctors in the field of Sports and Exercise Medicine. We have trained just over 100 from all over the globe in the past 15 years. I then started my doctoral studies in 2009 (it was conferred on me in 2012) investigating the positive effect of exercise on patients suffering from rheumatoid arthritis.

During my years in Sports Medicine, I have accompanied many national and international sports teams as team physician. Most notably being the team doctor for the SA Protea Netball Team from 1996-2000, the medical venue officer at the All Africa Games in Johannesburg in 1999, the team doctor for the Commonwealth Games to Manchester in 2002, the All Africa Games in Nigeria in 2003, the SA Olympic Team to Athens in 2004, the venue medical officer of the Loftus stadium during both the FIFA Confederations Cup in 2009 and the FIFA World Cup in 2010. Furthermore, my involvement with exercise/sport has led to fellowship and membership on a number of national and international committees including being named a fellow of the American College of Sports Medicine and FIMS, and a life member of South African Sports Medicine Association (SASMA).

What is your current work position and title?

I am an Associate Professor and Head of Department: Section Sports Medicine at the University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa.

How and when did you get involved with EIM?

An EIM SA Task Force was formed after the ACSM Congress of May 2012 to investigate the option of an EIM branch in South Africa. An official Task Force and office were set-up in the January 2013, and the official EIM SA Launch took place at the South African Sports Medicine Association's Congress in October 2013 at the Wild Coast Sun. I was involved right from the start!

How do you promote EIM through the work that you do?

Exercise has always been a part of my lifestyle. I have always been involved in sport and exercise, which is why I chose to do sports medicine. Understanding and witnessing the value of exercise, I have made it an integral part of my rheumatology practice. Patients who embrace exercise as part of their treatment report of the positive effect it has on their lives.

How has EIM influenced the work you do professionally and those you work with (your patients/clients/colleagues)?

The principles promoted by EIM strengthened my views on what I have been doing for years.

What are some of the challenges that you have faced in introducing and/or implementing EIM where you work?

Introducing the concept of exercise as a form of medication is a process taken in baby steps. South Africa has a number of very specific limiting factors:

- People go to shopping malls in their cars and typically look for the closest parking spot while the furthest one would have allowed for a free and easy exercise opportunity
- Gyms are very expensive and therefore excludes a large percentage of the population
- Safety is a problem in our country. It is not advised to exercise outside on your own or after dark. This makes it difficult to maintain an exercise program.

What are some of the successes that have you seen implementing EIM into your work?

It is very rewarding to see how regular exercise improves my patients' health. This was also proved in the research done for my doctoral degree, where the Disease Activity Score on rheumatoid arthritis who exercised not only came down, but in some cases lead to remission of the disease.

What advice do you have for early career professionals wanting to promote and develop careers related to EIM?

Treatment of disease or sickness should be seen as a multi-plan which can include medication, physical therapy, rehabilitation, exercise and lifestyle change. By making a few changes in one's lifestyle, it is possible that diseases such as hypertension and Diabetes Mellitus can be managed without chronic medication.