

1. Can you tell us about your professional background and any experiences you have from working with individuals with special needs?

I am a board certified Emergency Medicine and EMS physician. In this role, I have had the privilege of caring for individuals with special needs.

2. Why is physical activity important for individuals with special needs from a medical and developmental perspective? What are some of its physical, emotional, and social benefits?

Physical activity and sports have demonstrated health and developmental benefits. Physically, they can help with the development of strength, balance, and coordination. Increased physical activity can also treat or prevent obesity and its associated chronic medical conditions. In regard to mental health, playing sports and engaging in physical activity can promote a positive body image, increase confidence, and decrease symptoms of depression. Those who play sports also have the opportunity to learn and practice important social skills such as cooperative play and team skills.

3. What are some common barriers or challenges that individuals with special needs might face when trying to engage in physical activities? How can medical professionals, families, and communities address these challenges?

There can be social or physical barriers both real and perceived. It may be difficult to overcome the belief or perception that those with special needs are unable to participate in sports or physical activity, or that it is not safe for them to do so. There may also be physical barriers or requirements for modified or specialized equipment or more accessible play space. These barriers can be overcome with better education of individuals and communities, and a commitment to procuring resources to make sports and physical spaces more accessible and inclusive.

4. How can parents, caregivers, and educators encourage children and adults with special needs to participate in activities like those offered by the Special Olympics?

Find supportive communities and others who are doing the activities you would like to encourage. If people see others that they consider like themselves doing an activity, they are more likely to be willing to participate.

5. Have you observed any long-term developmental or health improvements in individuals with special needs who actively participate in sports or physical activities?

As an Emergency Medicine and EMS physician, I do not provide continuous care to individuals over time, so do not typically have the opportunity to observe long term development or health changes.

6. What advice would you give to families or caregivers who are hesitant to involve their loved ones in sports or physical activities?

Talk with your loved one and find out what sports or physical activities they are interested in. Find others with similar needs who are doing those activities. Find supportive communities and individuals to help you along the way. Have fun, be brave, be safe!