**Osler Essay Reflection**

**Topic:** I wanted to write about physicians’ social contract in elite sports because I think we (the general public), often see sports as mere entertainment. As such, we’ve often dehumanized athletes to commodities and nothing more. The media often portrays professional sports as a fun and glamorous hobby and athletes as over-paid celebrities. Professor Deborah Feltz, of Michigan State University says that athletes are “the last group of students who can be openly discriminated against”, with many student-athletes hearing statements from professors like “this test is easy enough that even an athlete could pass it.” I think it is human nature to compare our hardships to that of others, making it harder to have compassion for athletes because for the most part, all we see is how athletes are celebrated and idolized. In my research, I found that the public does not actually care for the health and being of their favourite athletes, they only care about their performance. Medically, they are an interesting population to treat because while most people seek medical attention to preserve physiological functions, the athlete will sacrifice their bodies for performance sake, and not always autonomously, putting physicians in a difficult position.

**Research Process:**   
 Researching this topic was difficult; it isn’t a hard science and there are no studies exploring standards of conduct for physicians in professional sports. I began my search in sports psychology in Scopus and PubMed. With the help of a librarian I learned how to use advanced search functions to hone the precision of identified papers relevant to my topic. The papers that I used served to provide hard evidence documenting how the institution of medicine has evolved, strategies for injury management or called for a need to establish better standards for concussion therapy. I learned to appreciate mixed methods research papers and qualitative research papers that aimed to capture patient voice and engagement.   
 These methodologies better informed me on how to pose research questions that value patient narrative. Understanding these methodologies proved to be invaluable to me in 2 ways: As a researcher, I gained another skillset to pose and answer research questions with. For this project, I was inspired to conduct my own interviews because I couldn’t find anything in the literature that documented athletes’ opinions on clinical decision making. I recruited Canadian Olympic Wrestler (Dorothy Yeats) and 1 Team Canada athlete to explore their relationships with their respective physicians. I learned to ask unbiased and open-ended questions to best capture their most authentic feelings and thoughts. Because the Team Canada athlete I interviewed, is a current Olympic hopeful for a team that will be selected based on coaches’ preferences, I agreed to exclude their interview completely to best protect their interests. However, this situation made me think to question how many other athletes may feel that they cannot speak out publicly about their concerns.   
 This prompted me to research documentaries and news sources to find evidence of abuses of power in elite sports organizations – I found many. The library’s newspaper and documentary database through Worldcat were instrumental for my project and for my growth as a researcher. As I ventured out of academic journals, I couldn’t help to realize how flawed our medical system is when it comes to evaluating the validity of “evidence”. In biomedicine, the value of pharmaceutical clinical trials needs no explanation, but there’s an assumption made that “clinically valuable information” is generated only when someone in authority cares enough to secure funding, to initiative a project, that results in published papers. It is implied that anything else, is not worth considering when it comes to clinical decision making, yet, the exploration of the biggest sexual abuse scandal in sports history is scant in the “literature”, but better documented through investigative journalism. I chose to use Netflix’s *Athlete A*, HBO’s Student-Athlete, and PBS’s *League of Denial* to guide my writing in a way that spoke to the lives of athletes in their respective institutions, that included the every-day impact of systemic failures on athletes and their families I chose to use testimony from these documentaries and news articles that better illustrated the significance of each issue discussed in my paper. I found these sources greatly increased the depth of and significance of my topic by not only providing raw materials, but also alerting me to look through government documents to better support my claims. Medicine as a profession serves to address societal inequities and I found that documentaries and news articles best empowered athletes and families that were exploited to voice their concerns and seek justice. I hope that medicine can incorporate these sources as evidence as well for policy reform instead of routinely relying on statistics or athletes willing enough to share their experiences in research studies. This project made me reflect upon the many assumptions we can make while conducting research and reminded that modern medicine needs less high-tech therapies and more humanistic touch. There are some wounds that can only be addressed through compassion, less judgement and a dedication to fight for equality. There is no better way to inspire this than by putting names of faces behind statistics and families behind tragedies. When we look into the lives of people, I think it is pivotal to give them a platform to speak freely. This is especially important in athletics because as recent history has shown, there is really no one advocating for athletes but themselves, and when you look at a sport like gymnastics, how can we expect girls as young as 6 years of age to know what exploitation looks like? Professional sports is a billion-dollar industry and we have all been a part of it in less obvious ways than participating in sports culture, such as purchasing products from sponsors of the Olympic games and watching movies or listening to music inspired by sports. Just as we have evolved to condemn companies using child labour in developing countries, I hope my paper has challenged readers to be more thoughtful of problems much closer to them than they may appear to be.