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Why I . . . horse ride

Major trauma consultant Diane Adamson talks to **Helen Jones** about her love of horse riding and how she raises awareness around equestrian injuries

Helen Jones

"When my friends qualified as doctors they went out and bought cars. I bought a horse," says Diane Adamson, a major trauma consultant at University Hospitals of North Midlands NHS Trust.

"I began riding as a child, but I had a break when I went to medical school as a mature student—I was divorced with two children and I couldn't afford to have a horse and do things for the children, so it went on hold." Adamson now has four horses, which she keeps on her farm in Cheshire. "Riding is just part of my life," she says. "If I'm on an early shift then I'm up at 5 am to muck out the horses and turn them out before I go to work. In the summer I might ride before work. I have an arena at home with lights so I can ride after work in the evenings."

Riding, she says, has had a positive impact on her sense of wellbeing, especially while working during the pandemic. "My horses are my best mates," she says. "Having to look after them and having a routine, particularly through covid-19, has kept me well, mentally. If I have bad cases at work then I go into the stables and spend time with the horses; it's a special feeling, very calming."

Adamson specialises in dressage as a serious accident at medical school, unrelated to riding, has made other riding styles more difficult for her. "I would have done eventing, which involves show jumping, cross country, and dressage, but the injury makes that more difficult," she says. "Learning classical dressage means that I am much more in control and much safer." She is currently being graded for para dressage competitions, which means that she will be able to compete like-for-like against other riders with disabilities.

To share her passion for horses, personal knowledge of injury, and medical expertise, Adamson has set up Facebook (www.facebook.com/medicalmare) and Instagram pages to highlight the sorts of injuries suffered by riders. "As a trauma consultant, I see a lot of equestrians. I just felt that, as doctors, we are not being as fastidious as we should be," she says.

Equestrians tend to underplay injuries and something they might describe as a "little fall" is probably the same mechanism as someone being ejected over the handlebars of a motorbike at 40 miles an hour, Adamson explains.

"If you had come off a motorbike and skidded down the road, you would have a straight trauma call," she says. "Equestrianism is quite niche and while doctors understand a sport like football or rugby and the injuries you can sustain, it's not always the same for riders."

She uses social media to connect with equestrians and share her expertise. "I hold a live rider clinic monthly that is supported by the equestrian industry," she says. "This month, for example, we're focusing on head injury. We can get up to 50 000 views so it's making my sport a bit safer and people more able to deal with accidents when they happen."

Despite the risks of riding, Adamson has managed to encourage several colleagues to take it up—including a nurse who started riding and bought a horse, and whose children and grandchildren now ride too.

"There are quite a few equestrians in medicine and nursing. I think it's because equestrians tend to be practical, can-do people and that's a large part of the character of people in healthcare," she says.

How to start riding

- Get lessons. "Even if you used to ride as a child, don't just get on a friend's horse and think you'll take it up again," says Adamson
- Find a riding school that is British Horse Society accredited
- Always wear a riding hat—there's no situation in which you shouldn't have a hat on
- If you buy a horse, make sure it fits your ability. "People with access to money sometimes over-horse, which means that they go out and buy the dream horse which may not be the right one for them, and they lose all confidence in riding," says Adamson. "You need to be careful about the horse you buy and honest with yourself about your own ability."