



LONDON CALLING

by Andrea Westfall | Photos courtesy of Peter Donaldson

Peter Donaldson, M.D., looks over Greenwich Park, site of all equestrian events for the 2012 Olympics.

Sports Medicine doc Peter Donaldson delivers care for U.S. team at 2012 Olympics in England

He isn't an Olympian, but Wayne State University School of Medicine alumnus Peter Donaldson, M.D., was in London, England, for the 2012 Summer Olympics.

It was a dream come true for the Sports Medicine doctor, who first applied for a spot on the official United States medical staff seven years ago.

"It was really special, the whole Olympic experience, the whole world coming together for two or three weeks. It's not too often the world comes together for something like that," said Dr. Donaldson, a Grosse Pointe Park, Mich., resident and 1999 School of Medicine graduate.

He was one of 20 medical doctors on an 85-member staff of physicians, athletic

trainers, chiropractors, massage therapists and physical therapists providing multidisciplinary care for 529 athletes at the U.S. team's dorm-based health clinic, which was open from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily. In the off hours, the volunteer physicians took turns being on call for their entire three-week tour of duty.

Dr. Donaldson, who is on staff at the Michigan Orthopaedic Institute in Southfield (affiliated with William Beaumont Health System), arrived in London July 19, 2012, 12 days before the opening ceremonies, and quickly familiarized himself with the U.S. clinic and the Olympic Village's all-country clinic — which he described as a state-of-the-art "mini-hospital."



While in London, he was assigned to both the general clinic and the U.S. equestrian team, which requested him based on his work at the Pan-American Games in 2011. He provided on-site care for the sport's 13 U.S. team members in six medal events – team and individual show jumping, eventing cross country and dressage.



Peter Donaldson, M.D., right, checks a U.S. equestrian team member's arm at the 2012 Olympic Games in London.

"They never really stopped competing," he said.

The equestrian events took place in London's Greenwich Park, a historical inland green space about 25 minutes from the Olympic Village.

Early in his trip, Dr. Donaldson treated athletes in training, met other countries' medical teams, visited Greenwich Park to learn course logistics and toured the other Olympic arenas, including the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club (home of Wimbledon) and Wembley Stadium. The tours were in preparation for emergency on-site injuries, which could have required emergency treatment or evacuation to hospitals.

"A lot of time is put into preparation, getting ready for the worst scenario you don't want to happen," he said.

As a Sports Medicine specialist, Dr. Donaldson has provided on-site medical care for Michigan universities, high schools and athletic teams, as well as an international stint with USA Hockey.

"It's always, what's reasonable and what time can you take away from work? You have to evaluate each opportunity as it comes up," he said.

He is board certified in Sports Medicine and Emergency Medicine, a dual certification he believes helped him win a spot on the elite U.S. Olympics' medical team.

While these summer games were his first main Olympics event, the United States Olympic Committee invited him to its training facility in Colorado Springs, Colo., just before the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing. He had been on a waiting list for more than two years. "They want to see how you are clinically, how you communicate with athletes and coaches, and how you work under pressure," he said.

He was selected to serve as a physician on the sled hockey team for the 2010 Winter Paralympics in Vancouver, and was a physician for the 2011 Pan-American Games in Mexico.

His first summer games were also a homecoming. Dr. Donaldson was born in England, living in Leamington Spa, northwest of London, until he was 4 years old. He was raised in Grosse Pointe, Mich., but is a dual citizen of both England and the U.S., and studied at Oxford University for one year as an undergraduate.

His first Olympics began July 28, 2012.

"They're competing at a higher level so there are more injuries, and you get under tighter time constraints to get people better faster," he said. Some injured athletes had less than 24 hours until their next event.



“In some ways it flew by. I was busy the whole time. For me, I probably saw less of the overall Olympics than I might have when I was home,” he said. “I got really embedded in the equestrian experience. They have their own little side stories.”

Among them: Queen Elizabeth’s granddaughter, Zara Phillips, competed for the British team. Her father, Mark Phillips, was one of three coaches for the U.S. team. “There were a lot of paparazzi around her and the team did really well,” he said.

While the majority of the physicians were volunteers, the United States Olympic Committee paid for the trip to London, plus room, board and a stipend for meals and other costs.

“We just throw everything we can at them,” he said.

Equestrian is one of the most popular sports in Britain, Dr. Donaldson said, and the events were among the first to sell out. Injuries are numerous.

“All the riders get overuse just like any athletes, hip and shoulder problems. It’s a dangerous sport and falls are relatively frequent. And you can see just about anything from falls,” he said, including concussions and fractures. “It’s a higher risk sport.”

The most serious injury he treated, a sacral fracture, occurred in a Canadian athlete who hit a tree after being thrown from her horse. The U.S.-born Canadian coach was head of the U.S. Equestrian Federation. “One of his riders went down, and he grabbed me because he had gotten to know me,” he said.

The days were long and busy, but Dr. Donaldson said he wouldn’t change a thing.

Dr. Donaldson didn’t always know he wanted to be a physician, and majored in Psychology at Boston University as an undergraduate. “I was trying to figure it out,” he said. “I applied a little later than some people. I had to fill everything in senior year.”

He participated in a post-baccalaureate program at Princeton University, working as a medical assistant with Sports Medicine doctors there. After graduating from WSU, he trained first in Emergency Medicine at an Emory University School of Medicine residency in Atlanta, then worked in Emergency Medicine in Portland, Maine, almost settling into an administrative role before completing a Sports Medicine fellowship with Michigan’s St. John Providence Hospital and Medical Centers in 2006.

Dr. Peter Donaldson trained for his Olympic volunteer experience at the United States Olympic Committee training facility in Colorado Springs, Colo.