

A Day in the Life of a Celebrity Chiropractor, Part 1

AN INTERVIEW WITH JAMES STOXEN, DC

Editorial Staff

Dr. James Stoxen truly is a chiropractor to the stars.

He has participated in more than 125 tours of top entertainers and Broadway productions and has a growing list of clients that includes numerous Grammy award-winning recording artists, actors and professional athletes. In this two-part interview, Dr. Stoxen provides insight into his challenging yet rewarding life as a celebrity chiropractor.

What's a typical day like for you?

On a "typical" day I get up at 7 a.m., go to the office, work out in my training center, take a shower and start with patients at 9 a.m. How late I end up working that day and with whom all depends on which athletes I'm preparing for competition, what events are happening that evening: sports competitions, Broadway productions, on-tour concerts, etc., and/or which VIPs have flown in that week for care.

Treating celebrity patients can create other kinds of demands on my schedule. I'm "on call" for five theaters, so I get a lot of calls from stage managers and tour managers to treat individual artists at their theater, hotel, recording studio or temporary residence. This could last until one or two in the morning.

If I'm working with nationally touring Broadway companies, I have treatment hours at the theater from 6 p.m. to 9:30 p.m., with half-hour slots. The show starts at 8 p.m., so I can get two to five performers treated before the show starts and the rest of the time is for swings, performers who are out with injuries and management. If there is a performer who needs extended treatment, I set a house call.

In the past four years, I have worked more than 100 tours for top recording artists, so business has become very busy. I have an agent in New York who represents me and negotiates my appearances for these assignments. If you ever get to this level, I highly recommend you hire an agent. Production managers, tour managers and artists are accustomed to hearing, "I would love to work with you but you will have to talk to my agent." I always get a wide-eyed response, but I'm a busy doctor (just as they are a busy entertainer) and have someone to take care of that for me. My agent usually negotiates a 4 p.m. to 10 p.m. appearance. However, if anyone needs care after that, I stay later.

For amateur and professional athletes, I treat and strength-train them in my clinic and training center. When we get to the venue, it's usually in the evening. I never treat the athlete the night before the competition. They were prepared to be ready long ago. If they aren't ready by then, I didn't properly prepare them. I have at least four to 10 athletes competing a month.

So, as you can tell, there is really no typical day. My day never ends before midnight, unless I'm

lecturing overseas or with my family.

When you're working with your celebrity patients, do you treat them at the venue while they're performing, or are most of your treatments pre- and post-performance?

Care for top recording artists happens at the venue on the day of the show. I get a very short e-mail like, "Wiggles 4 p.m., or Allstate 4 p.m." that usually includes the contact person for the backstage pass and set up, what/how I am getting paid and by whom. Most tours cover just the artist; the crew is on their own.

When I arrive, I meet with the production, stage or tour manager. I get my backstage pass and they set me up with a room to begin working. I ask who has special needs and on whom they want me to focus. Any other details of the assignment are ironed out during a five-minute meeting with management.

The volume of work is variable. The Wiggles have about 80 people on tour, only 15 of whom are performers. Any one of them could be experiencing health problems that need attention. The average tour has 120 to 150 cast members and crew. Bigger tours like the Rolling Stones could have 600 employees. The biggest tour I ever worked with was the Vans Shoes "Warped" tour, which had 900 support crew and artists. I only worked on the top executives from that tour.

Who gets treatment varies as well. Sometimes you are only called in for one artist. Most times you are called in for artists and crew. The crew is just as important to me as the performers. There are stage people, lighting people, sound people, truck and bus drivers, carpenters, security or bodyguards, tour managers, wardrobe, dressers, production managers and assistants - all kinds of different individuals involved in putting on a show.

After the artist is off tour, the crew jumps on another tour, so you are bound to see them back through town soon. You will get more requests from the crew and have more opportunities to build relationships with them than with the artist. If I am packing up at 10 p.m. and a guitar tech comes in the room in pain, I unpack and give them an hour-long treatment, if necessary. I've had a lot of recommendations from crew members who had previous great results to be the onsite chiropractor for huge tours.

Have you had any particularly unusual treatment situations on tour? What were they and what did you do?

I had an opportunity to work with one of my favorite bands. They've sold 80 million records and shaped my music preferences. Their bass player fell 12 feet into the orchestra pit. He landed on his feet, fell back into the wall, hit his head and had to be rushed to the hospital for X-rays and an MRI for broken bones, etc. When it was determined he had no broken bones, I was called in to examine and treat him. I did soft-tissue treatment for two hours and afterward, it was determined he could play that night and continue on with the tour.

The producer was extremely happy to see that the show would go on without a hitch. He gave me a laminated backstage pass and told me, "Doctor, you can come to any of the concerts on our tour and bring anyone you want backstage." I was very flattered and, of course, would have enjoyed that opportunity, but I never took him up on his offer.

If you want to make it in this business, you want to be thought of as a health professional who is only interested in the health and well-being of the cast and crew of the tour. If you are backstage without a working purpose, you are in the way and considered a "hanger-on." You will soon lose total respect from those who work on the tour. I've been invited to many after-parties with the most

famous celebrities in the world, but never go.

I've worked in mansions that resembled museums, lavish penthouses and circus trailers. I've worked with beautiful, iconic female artists and the following week, worked at an underground headbanger concert next to a tattoo artist, smelling burning flesh all day. I've worked next to man-eating lions at the Moscow Circus under motorcycle ramps, while cycles flew 70 feet over my head. I've adjusted teen idols and 400-pound strongmen with 24-inch necks. I've worked in recording studios while records were being cut, only to hear them a few months later on the radio. I've worked in just about every hotel room in Chicago and in tour buses, private planes and private homes.

As far as onsite sports assignments, I've worked backstage at UFC, WBC and WBO title fights. I've worked all day in extreme temperatures, from in excess of 100 F in Africa on sweaty track athletes to a frigid dungeon gym in Siberia with Olympic weightlifters. In every case, I have to be prepared to set up the table and go to work without complaining, wherever and whenever was convenient for the patient.

What are the most rewarding and most challenging aspects of working with top athletes, recording artists and other celebrities?

When I was a young man, my mom said, "What do you want to do with your life?" She seemed serious about it. She had a paper and pencil and wanted me to jot down some things. At 17, I liked going to rock concerts. She didn't say, "No, going to concerts isn't a career!" She just wrote it down. I told my mother I also liked working out, studying nutrition and diet, staying in shape, being an athlete, public speaking and traveling to explore the world and its cultures. Most of all, I wanted to be the best and to work with the best of the best.

We had a list of eight to 10 different things. She circled it and said, "Find a career that incorporates all of these things and you'll be living a life of which you dreamed." And that's exactly what I did. I know who I am and what my role is in life, and that makes me happy. I'm a true giver, and what makes me happiest is helping other people succeed. If I can do that, then I've achieved success. I don't mind the hours because I am doing what I love to do. How many of you can listen to the radio and find that sometimes, more than half of the songs were performed by your patients?

However, there are some challenges that come with this dream career. The most challenging aspect is trying to please everyone. When you are working for a top recording artist at night, your regular patients don't receive care that night. Your regular patients don't care with whom you worked; they just know they didn't feel good that night and they needed you.

The other thing that bothers me is getting an emergency call and being up all night with an artist. Due to a lack of sleep, I'm not on my best performance the next day. Unfortunately, it happens. Working with entertainers throws your regular practice off tremendously. It's not for everyone.

What types of equipment do you take with you to treat your patients?

I take only a massager/percusser instrument and a portable table. These people are road-weary, tired and their bodies ache everywhere. The massager/percusser is an excellent piece of equipment to get them ready fast for my treatment. You don't need stim or ultrasound. These people want a strong set of hands relieving their pain. I also take medical records and take excellent notes on all my patients. I lock all my records up in a safe, for obvious reasons.

What do you think makes your patients choose you as their chiropractor? How would you describe your relationship with the athletes and celebrities you treat?

There are several reasons why I am invited to treat these celebrity entertainers. The main reason is because I shoot for results. Most chiropractors make the mistake of thinking these entertainers are so busy that they don't have time for care. The road beats these people up. They are sleeping on a bus, traveling sometimes 15 hours to the next show and they are away from family and friends. They look forward to their "feel good" time and want efficient use of this time. When they come to me for care, I find out their needs immediately. "What do you need?" "Where does it hurt?" "How do you want me to treat you, and how much time do we have?" I set the alarm on my Blackberry and get to work.

Experience is an important factor as well. I've been working in the trenches for top athletes and entertainers for 20 years. I know my role and have gained a certain level of confidence knowing what to do and what not to do. People backstage can sense that you have been around the block and are not a rookie.

I've worked very hard to establish myself as a noted authority in biomechanics, treatment, nutrition and training. I have a unique approach to treatment that has been praised in the global medical community. I have been invited to numerous conferences throughout the United States and internationally. I am very proud of my contribution to advance the chiropractic profession image in the eyes of the medical profession.

I don't market to or call on production managers, tour managers or individual artists. If they contact me directly, I make them go through my agent. I never work around my agent, unless it is an emergency and my agent cannot be contacted. I've learned that "protocol" and respect is a necessity if you wish to survive in this business.

When you're speaking to someone for the first time, you only have one chance. You have to establish yourself by having a tremendous amount of confidence and conviction that you know what you're talking about. With your hands, you show them you know what you're doing. Your goal should always be to have them get up from the table and say "whoa" or "wow." That's what I shoot for on every visit. And that is my marketing and advertising.

Editor's Note: Part two of this interview will appear in the March 11 issue of *DC*.

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