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The Profile: **Danny Stiel**

## **SPECIAL PROJECTS**

<b>CV</b>	<b>Dr Danny Stiel, 49</b>
<b>1996 - 2000</b>	<b>Chief Medical Officer, Sydney Olympic Games</b>
<b>1995 - 1991-98</b>	<b>Clinical associate professor, University of Sydney, Head, Gastroenterology Department, Royal North Shore Hospital</b>
<b>1990</b>	<b>Secretary General, World Congresses of Gastroenterology, Sydney</b>
<b>1974</b>	<b>Graduated, University of Sydney</b>

About this time next year, Danny Stiel's seat will be starting to feel very warm. He just hopes it won't be uncomfortably hot. Stiel, the chief medical officer for the Sydney Olympics, knows only too well that his years of meticulous planning cannot guarantee a disaster-free Games.

He was at Atlanta, where a senior Polish Olympics official died of a heart attack in the stadium during the Games' opening ceremony. "It brought home to me, that if something as high profile as that is not well managed, the media would immediately attack," he says.

The bomb explosion at Atlanta, which claimed two lives, was another chilling reminder of the difficulty, if not impossibility, of being fully prepared for the unpredictable.

Stiel and his team are responsible for overseeing the medical care at training and competition venues for the Olympics and Paralympics for 30 days, covering more than 10,000 athletes, about 50,000 volunteers, 25,000 officials, 15,000 media and potentially millions of spectators. They must also cover related sites, such as the media village and torch relay.

The logistics are mind boggling - trying to juggle a small army of volunteers (and yes, more GP volunteers are still wanted) with the needs of 35 venues. Not to mention liaising with other services, including ambulance, hospitals and disaster response teams. Stiel and colleagues are also responsible for establishing and running a polyclinic in the athletes' village, which will offer just about every imaginable service to outpatients - from magnetic resonance imaging to dentistry, podiatry and medical care.

They will also be managing the program with perhaps the greatest potential for huge headlines - doping control. Even those aspects of the job which are not so high profile - such as public health measures to prevent food poisoning outbreaks - could attract the media's glare.

In July, when we meet in a small room in the central Sydney headquarters of the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (SOCOG), Stiel and team are in the midst of going through each venue and trying to work out what types of health professionals will be needed and for how many shifts. "We're trying to put the puzzle together," he says.

So what *is* a gastroenterologist - who is known by friends and family as a sportsman of the armchair variety - doing in a joint like this?

Think back to 1990 when a huge international gastroenterology congress was held in Sydney. At the time, it was billed as Australia's largest ever medical conference, and attracted several thousand delegates. Working in an honorary capacity with the Gastroenterological Society of Australia, Stiel put a solid two years of planning into that event.

Its "resounding success" reflected Stiel's excellent management, organisational, public speaking and people skills, recalls Kerry Goulston, a leading Sydney gastroenterologist also involved in the Congress.

Word must have travelled because when Rod McGeoch was planning Sydney's bid for the 2000 Olympics, Stiel was asked to chair the health and medical committee. He also helped present the bid to the International Olympic Committee.

Sporting contacts from his days as a rower and captain of the University of Sydney boat club probably also came in handy. His coxes in the 1960s and 1970s included John Coates, now president of the Australian Olympic Committee, and John Boulton, director of the Australian Institute of Sport.

Charmain Stiel says her husband is usually the calm in any storm. But she has never seen him as nervous as the night the Olympics host city was to be announced. The family had risen at 1am to hear the announcement at Homebush. "He was unbelievably tense," she says. "Nobody could talk to him."

When the chief medical officer's position was advertised, Charmain says the decision to apply was difficult because they knew the impact that such a commitment would have on family life, with three teenage children. There was also some financial sacrifice involved.

"And there is very little time for leisure for him," she says. "He doesn't have much play time at all and I think that's a bit sad because life's not a dress rehearsal."

Stiel was appointed in February 1996, working one day a week for SOCOG until earlier this year when it became three days a week. He has taken leave of absence from Royal North Shore Hospital (where he previously was head of the gastroenterology department). He will continue his private practice until next April, from when he will work full-time for the Olympics until October 2000.

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There is a moving twist to Stiel's current focus on the Olympics sites at Homebush. It is almost spitting distance from where he grew up, in a house that must have strained at the seams to accommodate two families. There were ten people to one bathroom (except for the few years when grandparents stayed, making it 12 to one).

Stiel's parents arrived in Australia in 1948 after fleeing Nazi Germany and spending several years in Tel Aviv, then in Palestine. His father, unable to practise law in his new country, and his uncle established the Meapro small goods business, where his 92-year-old mother still spends some time at work each week.

One of Stiel's brothers and a cousin now run Meapro. Stiel, the youngest of four, was influenced to study medicine because his older siblings, John and Mirjam, had done so. John is now an endocrinologist at the RNSH. "His dad was quite ill when he was younger, and I think he probably grew up with a great sense of responsibility," says Charmain.

Stiel has fond memories of Saturday afternoons in the family home. His uncle was tuned into the radio and putting illegal bets on the races. At the other extreme, his father was reclining in the lounge, listening to his beloved Wagner.

So who does Stiel take after? "Both," he says. He enjoys the theatre and opera, but also doesn't miss too many big sporting events, whether watching them on TV or live (and once wagged school to watch Test cricket).

Stiel may have been a good rower in his youth, but his sporting prowess these days tends to be the butt of friends' jokes. Dr Cameron Bell, a friend and colleague at the RNSH (who was Stiel's registrar and resident years ago) laughs: "He's a very ordinary touch footballer, an enthusiastic but talentless cricketer, and a dangerous golfer. He probably should carry a warning when he plays golf - something like the golfing equivalent of a long, wide load."

Stiel is also known amongst friends as a font of trivia and a great entertainer, participating in student and hospital revues and attracting some acclaim for his rather unique version of the Blue Danube - performed to the sound of chooks clucking. "I think he can relate the whole of the theme song from Gilligan's Island," adds Bell.

Charmain Doughan was working as a nurse at Manly Hospital 25 years ago when she first met Stiel, recently returned from overseas. "I can remember thinking what a really nice person he was. He was a very good person to work with," she remembers.

If anything, she describes her husband in even more glowing terms now - as humanitarian, humble, humorous and a hardworker not into self promotion or airs and graces.

For all his reputation as a party animal and social mixer, she says it can take time to get to know him well, and that he can be surprisingly shy. “A lot of professional men are like that. I think it’s something they learn in medicine as well because you need to put up a professional barrier in some way.”

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Those close to Stiel seem to have no doubts about his capacity for the Olympics job, even though the man himself half-jokes about his lack of formal management training.

“It’s a very onerous task that he’s committed himself to but it will be brilliantly done because he’s such a sensational organiser,” says a colleague, Dr Ted O’Loughlin, who refers to his old friend as “Doctor Dan”.

Charmain says Stiel’s eye for detail can sometimes seem pedantic, but is useful when pulling together big projects. “He’s very good at troubleshooting and he plans methodically. And whatever he does, he does it boots and all,” she adds.

Stiel was an intern more than 20 years ago when Michael Lunzer, a gastroenterologist at the RNSH, first met him. When Lunzer more recently needed the services of a gastroenterologist, he went to Stiel. “He’s pretty good with a tube,” Lunzer jokes.

More seriously, he describes Stiel as “warm, affable, enthusiastic, conscientious... outstanding in everything he does”.

Lunzer adds: “I think all of us sometimes get a bit dissatisfied with what we do, we like a change of direction. With medicine it’s quite hard to do that. Danny is lucky that he’s found something he feels so passionately about it and does so well. He will do it very very obsessively - all the i’s dotted and the t’s crossed. And he will make it tough on himself. The only thing that Danny does poorly is delegate.”

Bell says Stiel is “enormously capable” and one of the most respected doctors at the RNSH, for his skills as a teacher, clinician, and manager: “If you had to rely on someone, you’d want it to be someone like Danny.”

Stiel himself seems quietly confident about the job at hand. Which is not necessarily the same thing as relaxed. "I think I am a good judge of character and so I hope that I have been able to gather around the right people to do the task," he says. "It's the base of the pyramid that determines the success - the people who are doing the work at the coalface, both in planning and operations."

Stiel says the challenge of managing a one-off event is different to normal management because there is no room for stuff-ups or second chances. "It's exciting and it's totally different to anything else one might do," he adds. "It's dynamic and unstable. Unless you are involved in it, you can't imagine the complexity of it."

"And then it's over in a blink."

Stiel and family are already preparing for the inevitable post-Games let down. "I have been involved since 1991," he says. "It's an enormous thing to then have taken away, there will be a sense of loss and bereavement."

There are plans for a holiday, and then the challenge of resurrecting his medical practice. But no-one will be surprised if another special event then pops up. "I don't think you can top the Olympics," says Charmain. "But knowing him, he will find some other project."