

Confirming the Factors of Professional Readiness in Athletic Training

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Abstract : In the United States, athletic training is a healthcare profession that encompasses the prevention, examination, diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation of injuries and medical conditions. Athletic trainers work under the direction of or in collaboration with a physician and are recognized by the American Medical Association as allied healthcare professionals. Internationally, this profession is often known as athletic therapy. As healthcare professionals, athletic trainers must be prepared for autonomous practice immediately after graduation. However, new athletic trainers have been shown to have clinical areas of strength and weakness. To better assess professional readiness and improve the preparedness of new athletic trainers, the factors of athletic training professional readiness must be defined. Limited research exists defining the holistic aspects of professional readiness needed for athletic trainers. Confirming the factors of professional readiness in athletic training could enhance the professional preparation of athletic trainers and result in more highly prepared new professionals. The objective of this study was to further explore and confirm the factors of professional readiness in athletic training. Authors used a qualitative design based in grounded theory. Participants included athletic trainers with greater than 24 months of experience from a variety of work settings from each district of the National Athletic Trainer's Association. Participants took the demographic questionnaire electronically using Qualtrics Survey Software (Provo UT). After completing the demographic questionnaire, 20 participants were selected to complete one-on-one interviews using GoToMeeting audiovisual web conferencing software. IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, v. 21.0) was used to calculate descriptive statistics for participant demographics. The first author transcribed all interviews verbatim and utilized a grounded theory approach during qualitative data analysis. Data were analyzed using a constant comparative analysis and open and axial coding. Trustworthiness was established using reflexivity, member checks, and peer reviews. Analysis revealed four overarching themes, including management, interpersonal relations, clinical decision-making, and confidence. Management was categorized as athletic training services not involving direct patient care and was divided into three subthemes, including administration skills, advocacy, and time management. Interpersonal Relations was categorized as the need and ability of the athletic trainer to properly interact with others. Interpersonal relations was divided into three subthemes, including personality traits, communication, and collaborative practice. Clinical decision-making was categorized as the skills and attributes required by the athletic trainer when making clinical decisions related to patient care. Clinical decision-making was divided into three subthemes including clinical skills, continuing education, and reflective practice. The final theme was confidence. Participants discussed the importance of confidence regarding relationships building, clinical and administrative duties, and clinical decision-making. Overall, participants explained the value of a well-rounded athletic trainer and emphasized that athletic trainers need communication and organizational skills, the ability to collaborate, and must value self-reflection and continuing education in addition to having clinical expertise. Future research should finalize a comprehensive model of professional readiness for athletic training, develop a holistic assessment instrument for athletic training professional readiness, and explore the preparedness of new athletic trainers.

Keywords : autonomous practice, newly certified athletic trainer, preparedness for professional practice, transition to practice skills

Conference Title : ICSMATT 2022 : International Conference on Sport Medicine, Athletic Training and Therapy

Conference Location : Vancouver, Canada

Conference Dates : September 22-23, 2022