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A Qualitative Exploration and Analysis of Key Reasons Associated to Athletic Training Program Director Job Burnout and Role Strain

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CONTEXT

Athletic Training Program Directors (ATPD) have been identified as the individual responsible for the administration, organization, and leadership components of the Athletic Training Program (ATP). With emerging roles from the education side of the position, ATPDs feel new pressures, encounter different administrative dilemmas, and experience frustration with the incongruity of their role, which can lead to burnout. The limited research on burnout in ATPDs is informative, however has not been conducted in the past decade. The Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE) is implementing new Standards for ATP, which means having stability in the ATPD position is more important than ever and understanding what factors may lead ATPDs to pursue other career opportunities will be of utmost importance.

OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this research was to identify factors that lead to ATPDs pursuing other career opportunities and to identify thematic reasons related to ATPD burnout.

DESIGN

Cross-sectional study using web-based survey, which asks participants to disclose their ultimate career goals and perception of career burnout as an ATPD.

SETTING

Athletic Training Education.

PARTICIPANTS

A total of 47 ATPDs (24 males, 20 females, 2 gender non-conforming, and 1 did not disclose; 9.5 ± 6.4 total years as an ATPD).

INTERVENTIONS

Participants were asked to answer a University Institutional Review Board approved survey questions related to demographic information, ultimate career goals, and perception of career burnout as an ATPD.

MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES

Demographic information including total years of experience in the ATPD role. Qualitative responses to career goals and burnout were categorized, based on number of years of experience. ATPDs qualitative responses were initially read independently by three researchers for understanding and then coded with meaning units. These meaning units allowed the data to be organized into emerging themes and subthemes. Trustworthiness was established through data analyst triangulation and peer review. Data saturation occurred during the third round of thematic review.

RESULTS

Participants reported a variety of reasons they feel that being an ATPD causes role-strain. During data analysis, three themes emerged: 1) unrealistic allocation of effort, 2) challenges in meeting accreditation standards, and 3) lack of school or institutional support. ATPDs reported that the various responsibilities required of the

position do not allow for enough time to complete all required duties (i.e., teaching, service, and research), while traditional tenure-track positions place added stress on successfully completing the research aspect of the position. The administrative responsibility of the ATPD primarily centers around managing CAATE accreditation. Overseeing ATP Standards is a managerial aspect of being an ATPD, meeting Standards requirements to remain within the CAATE “active-in good standing” program status is a challenging aspect of the position due to the increased educational demands. Lastly, ATPDs encounter a lack of support within their school administration or university, which heightens the challenges in meeting their own job demands as well as accreditation.

CONCLUSIONS

The position of the ATPD is a required component within CAATE accredited ATPs. Over the past decade the requirements of the position have only slightly changed from the perspective of higher education, however the demands placed on the ATPD from the accreditation side have evolved with the ever-changing landscape of healthcare education. These incongruences have intensified the role-strain on ATPDs, creating an environment for job turnover, due to ATPDs seeking other career opportunities. In a time of educational reform and change within the profession, it is important to understand the stresses placed on ATPDs due to the direct impact it can have on the ATP.

KEYWORDS: *Athletic Training Program Director, role-strain, burnout*