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## ***The Perception of the Athletic Training Profession in the High School Setting***

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### **BACKGROUND**

Athletic training is a profession that is comprised of Certified Athletic Trainers (ATC) who are there, at the high school, to help protect and monitor the health, well-being, and safety of athletes.<sup>1</sup> "Athletic trainers (ATs) have historically functioned in a physician extender role when managing the health of competitive athletes in high school, collegiate, and professional settings. A high level of expertise in the prevention and management of musculoskeletal disorders among physically active individuals has been recognized by physicians who have chosen to utilize ATs as physician extenders in orthopedic and sports medicine clinical operations."<sup>2</sup> (pg. 1) An ATC is more than just a person that is at the sporting event that is trained in first aid and CPR. This person has acquired a bachelor's degree in science and also learned evaluation skills, emergency medical skills, rehabilitative techniques, and much more than what is taught in a basic CPR and first aid course. The basic CPR and first aid course teach useful skills for the coach to have to assist the ATC if needed in a situation, but for some employers to think that the CPR and first aid certification of a coach is sufficient enough to suffice in the place of an ATC is not good. Some studies that have been done in the past have shown that administrators, parents, and coaches do not know much about the profession of athletic training.<sup>3</sup> Some employers think that coaches can go to a seminar or a class to learn taping techniques that way the ATC is not needed.<sup>4</sup> When looking into the field of athletic training, this is a field in which the work place is predominately compromised of women, 54% of the NATA Certified Athletic Trainers are women.<sup>5</sup> Coaching, is a profession that is predominately

compromised by males that will challenge the Athletic Trainer. What this means is that when an athlete is injured, someone may call on an ATC to have to make a decision that could hinder the team and upset the coaching staff. If the ATC is a women and the coach is a male that could cause major issues because the coach may feel like they do not have to listen to the female ATC.

### **OBJECTIVE**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the knowledge, understanding, and perceptions of high school coaches when it comes to the athletic training profession.

### **DESIGN and SETTING**

This study used survey research to investigate a convenience sample of high school coaches from local southwest Ohio high schools (N=110). The independent variable of this study was the high school coaches that completed the survey, this includes gender and years of coaching experience. The dependent variable of the study was the coaches' understanding of the athletic training profession.

### **PARTICIPANTS**

The return rate of the survey was 73% (n=80). The survey analyzed male coaches vs. female coaches and novice-intermediate coaches vs. veteran coaches. The gender breakdown of the coaches that participated was 16% (n=13) female and 75% (n=46) male and 9% (n=8) non-respondents. The years of service of the coaches that participated was 61% (n=49) novice-intermediate coaches and 30% (n=24) veteran coaches and 9% (n=7) of the coaches that participated were non-respondents.

## **INTERVENTION**

A panel of experts determined the face validity of this survey. The content validity was established through the Table of Specifications. Chi Square test was used with gender and years of coaching experience as the grouping variables. The alpha level was set at  $p=.05$  *a priori*. This study was submitted for exempted review by the Wilmington College Institutional Review Board (IRB) in order to protect the human subjects who participate in this study. The data was analyzed by using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software 24.0.

## **MAIN OUTCOME MEASUREMENTS**

This survey used both a 4 point Likert Scale and a 2 point Likert Scale. Questions 1 and 6 through 10 used the 4 point Likert Scale. (Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1)). Questions 2 through 5 used a 2 point Likert Scale (True (2) or False (1)). Questions 11, 12, and 14 are opened ended qualitative questions and the responses were thematically coded. Question 13 used a 2 point Likert Scale (Male (2) or Female (1)).

## **RESULTS**

100% (n=80) of the coaches agreed or strongly agreed that Athletic Trainers know how to manage the health and well-being of an athlete. However, 5% (n=4) of the coaches disagreed that Athletic Trainers know how to deal with emergency medical situations. 97.5% (n=78) of the coaches agreed or strongly agreed that athletic training is a health care profession that is recognized by the American Medical Association. 38.8% (n=31) of the coaches believe incorrectly that Athletic Trainers are qualified to do sutures. Looking at the coaches' understanding of Athletic Training as a profession, there was a question that came back statistically significant ( $X^2= 5.568$  ,  $df=1$ ,  $p= .018$ ); this question evaluated the coaches understanding when it comes to the ATC and the organization and management of the

athletes. 74.5% (n=41) of the novice-intermediate coaches and 15.5% (n=14) of the veteran coaches strongly agreed with that statement. 100% (n=13) of the female coaches and 70% (n=42) of the male coaches strongly agreed while 30% (n=18) of the male coaches agreed ( $X^2= 5.176$  ,  $df=1$ ,  $p= .023$ ) with that statement. Next the survey also evaluated the perceptions that the coaches have towards the profession. 40% (n=19) of the novice-intermediate coaches and 40% (n=9) of the veteran coaches believe that Athletic Trainers are qualified to administer sutures, when that is actually false, at this moment in time. On the other hand, 69% (n=9) of the female coaches and 33% (n=19) of the male coaches also believe that Athletic Trainers can administer sutures. Lastly the knoweldge of the athletic training profession was evaluated when asked if the coaches knew that the Athletic Trainers were there for the injury prevention of the athletes. 6% (n=3) of the novice-intermediate coaches strongly disagreed or disagreed with that statement. Then looking at the gender breakdown, 92% (n=12) of the female coaches and 96% (n=58) of the male coaches stromgly agreed or agreed with the statement.

## **LIMITATIONS**

The limitations of this study were the return rate of the survey, the population surveyed, convenience sampling, and some of the answer options on the instrument. There should have been a 'neutral' or 'unsure' option included on the instrument.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

High school coaches know the primary role of an Athletic Trainer. The misunderstanding of the athletic training profession happens due to the fact that coaches do not know that Athletic Trainers are there for the primary care of the athlete in conjunction with rehabilitation and treatment as well. This is problematic because one of the domains of athletic training is that Athletic Trainers are there for the healthcare and well-being of the

athlete, meaning they will follow up with the athlete and their status on return-to-play.

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**KEY WORDS:** *misperceptions, athletic training profession, high school coaches, barriers, knowledge of athletic training*