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Employer Perceptions of Newly Credentialed Athletic Trainers as They Transition to Practice

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OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this study was to describe Midwest based employer perceptions of newly credentialed athletic trainers' (NCATs) transition to practice and to provide best practice guidelines to inform the onboarding processes of NCATs.

DESIGN AND SETTING

A descriptive qualitative study design using interviews with employers of NCATs. Interviews were conducted in person or by phone.

PARTICIPANTS

A convenience sample of 10 supervisors of athletic trainers, representing large medical centers, outreach sports medicine clinics, and division I collegiate athletic programs were recruited throughout the Midwest. Supervisors reported an average of 13.5 years of experience (range=5-26) supervising NCATs and supervising on average 28.5 athletic trainers annually (range=13-72). Four participants were female and six were male.

INTERVENTION

A semi-structured interview script adapted from previous studies was used to guide the interviews.¹⁻² Questions addressed job title, role in the company, and experiences. Other topics included interactions with NCATs, supervisor expectations, strengths and weaknesses of NCATs, and a description of the organization's current onboarding process. One researcher conducted all interviews, and each interview was completed in 30-45 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded.

MAIN OUTCOME MEASUREMENTS

Data saturation drove recruitment. Audio

recordings were transcribed verbatim and reviewed by each participant to establish trustworthiness. The researcher independently coded emergent themes using content analysis. A peer auditor completed an independent review of the transcripts to verify coding. Disagreements between the researcher and peer auditor were negotiated until consensus was reached.

RESULTS

Two themes emerged: (1) characteristics of NCATs and (2) onboarding processes. The theme, characteristics of NCATs, was organized into two categories: 1) Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs), and 2) realistic job expectations. The majority of supervisors felt that NCATs possessed a strong knowledge base; however, the translation of that knowledge into autonomous clinical skills was an area where NCATs struggle. Communication and the ability to prioritize patient cases and manage patient volume were abilities requiring the most mentorship amongst NCATs. Additionally, supervisors commonly described unrealistic job expectations expressed by NCATs. Examples included confusion over first and second shift responsibilities and an unwillingness to work weekends, holidays and/or overtime without compensation. In regards to onboarding processes, the supervisors described seven different elements of onboarding processes used to orient NCATs to their new jobs. These onboarding elements (i.e., organization and department orientations, department shadowing, informal and formal mentorship, continuing education workshops, and skill assessments) were used in different

combinations and frequencies between the organizations.

CONCLUSION

NCATs possess a strong knowledge base but struggle to transition knowledge to autonomous clinical practice and to facilitate non-technology assisted communication. They also tend to be unaware of the need to work second shift and holidays. These deficiencies can be addressed through a yearlong onboarding process that includes organization and department orientation, department shadowing, formal mentorship, ongoing educational seminars, and skill assessment. Each of these onboarding elements can be used to develop the characteristics (i.e., KSA) identified as weaknesses by supervisors. Table 1 provides an example of which of the supervisor identified onboarding elements could be used to address knowledge, skills, and/or abilities.

Onboarding Element	KSA	Frequency of Theme
Organization Orientation	K	10
Department Orientation	K	10
Various Department Shadowing	KA	4
Informal Mentorship	KS	6
Formal Mentorship	KSA	3
Continuing Education/Collaboration	KSA	9
Skill Assessments	S	1

Table 1: Frequency of onboarding elements identified by supervisors and their relation to knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA).

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KEY WORDS: *Newly Credentialed Athletic Trainer, Athletic Training Supervisor, Employer, Stakeholder, Onboarding, Mentorship*