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Perceived Effectiveness of Onboarding Programs for Athletic Trainers

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OBJECTIVE
(1) To describe onboarding tactics experienced by participants, (2) to determine the perceived effectiveness of these tactics, and (3) determine the perceived effectiveness of a proposed program based upon onboarding best practices.

DESIGN and SETTING
A nation-wide cohort study using a questionnaire distributed through the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) Research Survey Service.

PARTICIPANTS
A random sample of 1000 NATA members who were (1) certified by the Board of Certification (BOC) between 2010-2020 and (2) employed full-time as an athletic trainer (AT). 85 participants (61 females, 24 males) completed the survey for a response rate of 8.5%. The mean age of participants was 28.8 ± 4.0 years.

INTERVENTION
Participants completed a modified version of the Orientation Tactics Survey (OTS), which is scored using a 4-point Likert scale (1 = no useful, 4 = very useful). The OTS was previously validated and has reported internal consistency (α = 0.802) for its three domains: (1) demographics, (2) identification of onboarding tactics experienced by participants, and (3) perceived effectiveness of these experienced tactics. The modified instrument consists of an additional domain, where the researchers duplicated the third domain, so that the effectiveness questions were asked twice, once for the experienced onboarding tactics and a second time for the proposed onboarding tactics.

MAIN OUTCOME MEASUREMENTS
Descriptive statistics were calculated to describe the onboarding tactics experienced by participants. Participants' responses to the effectiveness domains (experienced and proposed) were expressed as a summated score (0 – 100), the higher the score, the better the perceived effectiveness. The mean summated scores for the two programs were compared using a t-test. The a priori level was set at $p < 0.05$. A change score was calculated between the mean summated scores for the experienced and proposed onboarding programs.

RESULTS
Amongst the participants, the most reported job settings were Division I university (n=18) and secondary school employed by a clinic or hospital (n=23). The most common onboarding tactics experienced by ATs were (1) explanation of benefits from human resources (n=78, 91.8%), (2) tour of facilities (n=75, 88.2%), and (3) being told duties and responsibilities (n=73, 85.9%). The mean effectiveness score of the experienced onboarding program was 51.6 ± 20.40, and the mean effectiveness score of the proposed onboarding program was an 87.2 ± 9.42. The tactics in the proposed program rated most effective were (1) practicing activation of the emergency action plan (3.76 ± 0.43), (2) meeting with AT staff members (3.71 ± 0.48), and (3) touring facilities (3.69 ± 0.47). The rated effectiveness between the two programs was statistically significant (t = -16.9, df=79, p=0.00), and the mean change score between the two programs was 35.7 ± 18.84 (range = 0 – 87) with the proposed program consistently perceived as more effective.

CONCLUSION

Participants perceived the effectiveness of the proposed onboarding program to be superior to the onboarding programs they experienced as new employees. The perceived effectiveness for each tactic in the proposed program ranged from useful to very useful and could be implemented in a population of newly hired ATs as a means to improve employee satisfaction and performance. Health care organizations should implement employee onboarding best practices in an effort to support new employees, increase clinician confidence, decrease employee turnover, and decrease medical errors.

KEY WORDS: *Orientation, Onboarding, Onboarding in Health Care*