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Caring for Pregnant and Postpartum Athletes: Athletic Trainers, Strength Coaches, and Athletic Coaches

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OBJECTIVE

A survey was created to assess the experience, education, and self-perceived competence of treating and/or training pregnant and postpartum athletes among athletic trainers, strength coaches, and coaches.

DESIGN and SETTING

Subjects were recruited through mass email distribution. This was accomplished by first gathering email addresses for all coaches of female college athletic teams, all college/university athletic trainers (ATs), and all strength and conditioning coaches (SC) at the institutions. Email addresses were retrieved from every college and university in the country for all National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) DI, DII, DIII, National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), and community colleges (CC).

PARTICIPANTS

Inclusion criteria for subjects included being a university or college AT, SC, or coach of at least 18 years of age. A total of 1,137 participants started the survey with 8 being excluded from the study for not being either a college/university AT, SC, or coach. This left a total of 1,129 participants who were eligible to complete the survey. Participants included ATs (n=548), SC (n=201), and coaches (n=380).

INTERVENTION

None as this was survey-based research

MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES

None as this was survey-based research

RESULTS

The results demonstrated that despite working with females of childbearing age, the vast majority of these professionals have little to no education in how to treat or train a pregnant or postpartum athlete. 78.6% of SCs, 82.7% of ATs, and 93.7% of coaches reported having no formal education in treating or training pregnant or postpartum athletes. Additionally, 30.2% of ATs, 27.9% of SCs and 25.3% of coaches report having treated or trained a pregnant or postpartum athlete. When asked how knowledgeable they were in this aspect, 8.2% (n=45) of ATs answered "knowledgeable," and 1.1% (n=6) answered, "very knowledgeable," 16.9% (n=34) of SCs answered, "knowledgeable," and 5% (n=10) answered, "very knowledgeable," and 7.4% (n=28) of coaches answered, "knowledgeable," and 1.8% (n=7) answered, "very knowledgeable." These results demonstrate that these professionals have a low level of confidence in making pregnancy-specific and postpartum-specific modifications to treatment and training sessions.

CONCLUSION

There appears to be a knowledge gap within the continuum of healthcare for pregnant and postpartum collegiate athletes. Professionals working with these unique population have limited education on treating and training these athletes and have demonstrated that they have had to treat and train them without

proper education. It is also concluded that these professionals have a positive attitude towards potentially receiving additional

education on providing proper treatment and training modifications.