

Journal of Sports Medicine and Allied Health Sciences: Official Journal of the Ohio Athletic Trainers Association

Volume 3

Issue 1 *Ohio Athletic Trainers' Association Special Edition*

Article 14

May 2017

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Recommended Citation

Hayes, Alisha; Walker, Jennifer; and Smith-Goodwin, Erika (2017) "High School Athletic Trainers' Understanding of Best Practice and Incorporation of The NATA's Position Statement on Ankle Sprains," *Journal of Sports Medicine and Allied Health Sciences: Official Journal of the Ohio Athletic Trainers Association*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 14.

DOI: 10.25035/jsmahs.03.01.14

Available at: <http://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/jsmahs/vol3/iss1/14>

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High School Athletic Trainers' Understanding of Best Practice and Incorporation of the NATA Position Statement on Ankle Sprains

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CONTEXT

The NATA and NATA Foundation states that it “publishes position statements as a service to promote the awareness of certain issues to their members.” In August of 2013, the National Athletic Trainers’ Association Position Statement: Conservative Management and Prevention of Ankle Sprains in Athletes was published in the Journal of Athletic Training. The recommendations in this position statement were “intended to provide athletic trainers and other sports health care professionals with guidelines and criteria to deliver the best health care possible for the prevention and management of ankle sprains. An endorsement as to best practice is made whenever evidence supporting the recommendation is available.”

OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this study was to determine high school athletic trainers’ understanding and incorporation of the NATA’s position statement on management and prevention of ankle sprains.

DESIGN AND SETTING

This study used a survey research design and was conducted at a Division III college in Ohio. The independent variables were high school certified athletic trainers, their years of certification, and their level of education. The dependent variable was their understanding and incorporation of the NATA’s position statement and the management and prevention of ankle sprains.

PARTICIPANTS

The return rate was 39% (n=45) with a convenience sample target population of N=114. 13% (n=6) have been certified for 0-3 years, 38% (n=17) have been certified for 4-7 years, 27% (n=12) have been certified for 8-15 years, and 22% (n=10) have been certified for 16 years or more. 55% (n=24) had a Bachelor’s degree, 45% (n=20) had a Master’s degree and 0% had a Doctorate degree.

INTERVENTIONS

The research was approved by the College Institutional Review Board. Content validity was established through the Table of Specifications. Face validity was established through a panel of experts. Descriptive statistics (% and frequency counts) were used for all applicable items. SPSS 21.0 was used to analyze the data.

MAIN OUTCOME MEASUREMENTS

The survey asked 27 questions. Questions 1-14 used a 5-point Likert scale. (Always(5), Moderately(4), Neutral(3), Rarely(2), Never(1)) Questions 15-17 were demographic questions. Questions 18-27 used a 3-point Likert scale. (True(3), False(2), Don’t Know(1))

RESULTS

The results found, the majority of High School Athletic Trainers follow best practice as noted in the position statement: 80% (n=36) ‘always’ use cryotherapy, 60% (n=27) ‘always’ use compression, 100% (n=45) ‘always’ use functional rehabilitation, therapeutic exercise/functional treatment

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and ROM exercises. 91% (n=41) reported 'always' or 'moderately' using plyometric exercises while 48% (n=22) said they 'rarely' or 'never' use thermotherapy, and 42% (n=19) said they 'rarely' or 'never' use joint mobilization. On the ten question knowledge/understanding test about the management and prevention of ankle sprains per the position statement, only 26% (n=12) correctly answered 80% or higher, 27% (n=12) received a 70% or higher, and 45% (n=20) received a 60% or lower. There were two questions that over half of those that participated answered incorrectly. One states, "The cotton test checks for high ankle sprains." 71% (n=32) incorrectly answered as 'false' or 'don't know'. The other most missed question was, "Ottawa ankle rules check for grade III ankle sprains." 53% (n=24) incorrectly answered as 'true' or 'don't know'. Interestingly, 40% (n=18) of Athletic Trainers with a Master's degree got the cotton test question correct opposed to 17% (n=8) with a Bachelor's degree. 57% (n=4) of the individuals with their Master's who have been certified for 7 years or less got a 90% or higher on the knowledge test while 14% (n=1) got below a 60%. 0% of those with a Bachelor's degree received higher than a 90% on the knowledge test and 56% (n=9) received lower than a 60%. Master's and Bachelor's with 8 or more years of experience were similar with those that received a 90% or higher but 38% (n=3) of Bachelor's had less than 60% on the

test and 62% (n=8) of Master's had less than a 60%. Overall the scores were similar when broken down by just years of certification, regardless of degree, 57% (n=13) of those certified for 7 or less years got a passing grade and those certified for more than 8 years had 50% (n=11) that got a passing grade.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, Certified Athletic Trainers in this study are providing the care recommended in the position statement. However, it is clear there is a lack of knowledge and understanding of the guidelines and criteria for best practice in the prevention and management of ankle sprains. It would appear, from this study that athletic trainers could benefit from using this NATA position statement as a more widely used resource.

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KEY WORDS: *ankle sprain, NATA Position Statement, Certified Athletic Trainer, management, prevention, best practice*