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Factors Contributing to Professional Self-Efficacy Levels in Recently Graduated Certified Athletic Trainers

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ABSTRACT

Self-efficacy is an important factor for job success; however, it has been cited as a missing factor in all athletic training graduates. Therefore, the objective of this study was to find what factors affect the development of self-efficacy in the recently graduated certified athletic trainer. A qualitative survey method was utilized that involved questions aimed to extract such as professional experiences and opinions as possible. Online surveys were sent out electronically to 1,086 professional participants. A total of 64 survey responses were completed but only 52 were qualified for inclusion into the study. Data was collected via the online survey service and analyzed through review, synthesis, and extraction of common themes. Several themes were extracted and considered as factors that affect self-efficacy development in the recently graduated certified athletic trainer. The results provide legitimate suggestions for how to increase self-confidence in the athletic training student.

INTRODUCTION

It is undeniable that professional self-efficacy is an important factor for job success. A crucial method that is foundational in developing professional self-efficacy in the undergraduate student is through a school educational program, especially through clinical education for the athletic training student. Because of these factors, educators should know what activities aid its development in a student. Self-efficacy is a term that has commonly been defined as a person's belief about his or her ability to successfully perform and accomplish a task in the face of limitations (Bandura 1982). High perceived self-efficacy results in less fear to perform, less initial stress on performance, and take responsibility to intentionally promote performance and take action (Bandura 1982). Therefore, the objective of this study was to find what factors contribute to the development of professional self-efficacy in the recently graduated certified athletic trainer. The results specifically provide suggestions for athletic training education programs to follow in order to increase student self-efficacy levels.

METHODS

The proposed study was conducted with Cedarville University's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. The study received approval to proceed as specified on September 9, 2015. An online survey was constructed using Qualtrics software. The survey consisted of 14 closed-ended questions and 2 open-ended questions. Several questions assessed demographic information including state licensure and years of experience. Confidence assessment of 5 athletic training skills was conducted using a 7-point Likert scale. The final section included open-ended questions aimed at extracting personal experiences and opinions. A total of 1,086 athletic trainers registered in the National Athletic Trainers' Association's Young Professionals Committee with a registered email address were contacted regarding the study. An email containing a cover letter and a link to the survey was forwarded to each of the potential participants. Of those who contacted, 66 completed the survey, but only 52 qualified for inclusion in the study. Before participating in the study, all respondents read and agreed to an informed consent statement approved by the Cedarville University's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. In order to respect the participants' rights, the objective of the study, the confidentiality of the information shared, and the individual's right to not participate in the study were explained to them in the survey invitation email.

RESULTS

Of the 1,086 surveys sent out, 64 responses were received and only 52 surveys were able to be utilized for data analysis which accounted the response rate to be 5%. Each survey was completed by one study participant; therefore, a total of 52 participants were included in this study (19 males, 33 females, mean age 25.78 years, mean years of experience 2.78 years). All 10 NATA districts and 30 states were represented by the respondents. Of the 52 total participants, 46 received undergraduate athletic training degrees from a CAATE-accredited college or university while the remaining 4 (accredited by the Central Athletic Training program) university while the remaining 4 (accredited by the Central Athletic Training program) undergraduate athletic training graduates from a CAATE-accredited college or university, only 18 of the total participants received an athletic training degree from both a CAATE-accredited undergraduate and graduate institution. 46 of the respondents passed the Board of Certification examination on their first attempt, only 17 participants are practicing without coworkers or a supervisor, and 30 participants have practiced athletic training elsewhere other than their current setting.

The major findings of the results of this study are that there are legitimate factors in undergraduate athletic training education programs that influence the development of self-efficacy in the recently graduated certified athletic trainer that there was not just one specific aspect of the undergraduate athletic training education program that influenced the development of self-efficacy, that not every undergraduate athletic training education program seems to be able to have a role in the development of self-efficacy, but that there are legitimate factors in professional practice that have a role in the development of self-efficacy that are different than the factors provided in educational training.

CONCLUSION

The results indicate that there are legitimate factors that support and are supported by current literature that contribute to the development of professional self-efficacy levels in recently graduated certified athletic trainers. Along with the results, the study also provided legitimate, research-supported suggestions as how to increase self-efficacy levels in the undergraduate athletic training student. It is important for this information to be considered due to an established need for self-efficacy levels in the recently graduated certified athletic trainer. The results provide legitimate suggestions for how to increase self-confidence in the athletic training student.

Multiple studies have shown that self-efficacy is an important determinant in task performance and perseverance, but a high level of self-efficacy does have an impact to the quality of healthcare provided (Derwall & Oldberding 2010). Carr & Oldberding have established evidence that there is a deficiency in self-efficacy levels in new athletic training graduates. Therefore, the importance of the results of this study is that it can aid in the provision of implementable and practical suggestions as to what can be done to reduce the high levels of low self-efficacy in new athletic training graduates. Based on logical, if healthcare quality can be improved with high self-efficacy levels, then a reduction in low self-efficacy levels in new athletic training graduates will aid in higher quality athletic training services.

The results of the study support the suggestions found in several studies found within a review of the current literature that have researched the impact of self-efficacy, the factors that affect self-efficacy, and the factors that increase self-efficacy. One interesting thing to note is that although "autonomy" was a theme found to be consistent in almost every open-ended question and was mentioned in at least one theme in every open-ended question, it was not a consistent finding with the results of other studies found by the lead researcher when reviewing a review of existing literature regarding the factors that affect self-efficacy and the factors to increase self-efficacy was used. Even though there may not be any existing literature regarding clinical autonomy's role in the development of self-efficacy, we believe that autonomy is still an important factor in the development of self-efficacy in the athletic training student and should be seriously considered as an important factor to be considered when assessing methods to increase self-efficacy the athletic training student and in the healthcare professional. All of the results of this study are believed to be able to be used by all healthcare professionals but most specifically by athletic training healthcare professionals and education staff in order to develop confidence in the young healthcare professional. The results specifically provide suggestions for athletic training education and for athletic training education programs to follow in order to increase student self-efficacy levels. Limitations of the study include a low response rate of 5.2%, time constraints, poor communication, and poorly developed and formatted survey questions.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to identify what factors in a young, employed certified athletic trainer's (ATC) undergraduate athletic training studies may have contributed to their self-efficacy levels in professional practice. The proposed study was submitted to Cedarville University's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. The study received approval to proceed as specified on September 9, 2015. An online survey was constructed using Qualtrics software. The survey consisted of 14 closed-ended questions and 2 open-ended questions. Several questions assessed demographic information including state licensure and years of experience. Confidence assessment of 5 athletic training skills was conducted using a 7-point Likert scale. The final section included open-ended questions aimed at extracting personal experiences and opinions. The more frequent factors contributing to professional self-efficacy in the recently graduated certified athletic trainer. The results provide legitimate suggestions for how to increase self-confidence in the athletic training student.

The results of this study support and are supported by findings in several studies found within a review of the current literature that have researched the impact of self-efficacy, the factors that affect self-efficacy, and the factors that increase self-efficacy. One interesting thing to note is that although "autonomy" was a theme found to be consistent in almost every open-ended question and was mentioned in at least one theme in every open-ended question, it was not a consistent finding with the results of other studies found by the lead researcher when reviewing a review of existing literature regarding the factors that affect self-efficacy and the factors to increase self-efficacy was used. Even though there may not be any existing literature regarding clinical autonomy's role in the development of self-efficacy, we believe that autonomy is still an important factor in the development of self-efficacy in the athletic training student and should be seriously considered as an important factor to be considered when assessing methods to increase self-efficacy the athletic training student and in the healthcare professional. All of the results of this study are believed to be able to be used by all healthcare professionals but most specifically by athletic training healthcare professionals and education staff in order to develop confidence in the young healthcare professional. The results specifically provide suggestions for athletic training education and for athletic training education programs to follow in order to increase student self-efficacy levels. Limitations of the study include a low response rate of 5.2%, time constraints, poor communication, and poorly developed and formatted survey questions.