THE KNOWLEDGE AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE PROFESSION OF ATHLETIC TRAINING IN A GENERAL POPULATION.

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Context: Few studies have been conducted on the public's knowledge of the profession of athletic training (AT)¹. According to Felling, there are misunderstandings regarding the roles and duties of athletic trainers¹. Objective: To determine the knowledge and perception of the AT profession in a general population. Design: Descriptive survey. Setting: A midsize rural University and its surrounding community. Participants: A convenience sample of 200 members of the general population. 192 participants’ responses were used, age range 18 – 73, gender = 50.5% (n = 97) male, 49.5% (n = 95) female. Interventions: A quantitative survey based on the six domains of AT, information obtained from the NATA website and Arnheim’s Principles of Athletic Training text⁵ was developed and administered. Reliability was not tested; the instrument was reviewed for content validity by several ATCs. Participants were questioned regarding the duties, job settings, professional requirements and average starting salary of AT. Demographics were also obtained (i.e. age, gender, education level). Main Outcome Measure: A 4-part instrument was developed. Knowledge of the six domains of AT was assessed in part one (13 items) & four (15 items), knowledge of AT job settings in part two (13 items), and knowledge of educational requirements and salaries in part three (3 items). Each correct response was awarded one point. In part four, one point was deducted for an incorrect response because respondents had the neutral option of responding “I don’t know.” A total score was calculated. Descriptive statistics were reported and Independent T-tests used to determine significance. Results: The overall mean score for the total questionnaire was 69.2% (30/44) ± 11.5%. A significant difference (p < .05) was found between mean scores of those who have used the services of an athletic trainer versus those who have not (p = .003), also between part one mean scores and gender (p = .048). No significant differences were found between age groups 18-30 and 31-73 and total scores (p = .879), or between age groups 18-22 and 23-73 and total scores (p = .926). A positive correlation existed between respondents’ educational level and mean total score. Fifty-three percent (n = 102) of respondents believed the average starting salary of a certified athletic trainer was $25,000-34,000, and 27% (n = 52) of the respondents thought average starting salary was $35,000 or higher. Conclusions: Results suggest a deficit in knowledge of the athletic training profession. Participants did not fully recognize the diversity of the profession of athletic training.