A Comparison of Athletic Training Student and Preceptor Perceptions on Mentorship in Clinical Education
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Context: Mentoring occurs when an individual with more experience assists in the development and guidance of an individual with less experience; this has been shown to help promote learning of one’s professional role. The clinical education setting places athletic training students and preceptors in an environment where mentoring may occur. Though numerous studies have identified beneficial elements and outcomes of mentoring few have directly compared student and preceptor perspectives on mentoring as it relates to clinical education. Objective: Compare the perceptions of preceptors and athletic training students on mentorship in clinical education. Design: Mixed methods study. Setting: Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE) programs. Patients or Other Participants: 12 preceptors affiliated with and 17 athletic training students enrolled in 7 different CAATE accredited programs. Preceptors, (5 males and 7 females), had an average of 5±5 years experience as a preceptor. Students, (3 males and 14 females), represented a variety of academic levels: 1 sophomore, 9 juniors, and 7 seniors. Data Collection and Analysis: All participants completed the validated (α=.85) Athletic Training Perceptions of Effective Mentoring Survey (ATSPME) and 14 open-ended interview questions regarding their perceptions of mentoring in clinical education. Independent t tests were performed to compare mean scores on the ATSPME. Qualitative data was analyzed using an inductive approach to identify codes, categories and themes. Trustworthiness was established through data source triangulation, multiple analyst triangulation, and peer review. Results: There were no significant differences found between the mean scores of athletic training students and preceptors’ perceptions of mentoring on the ATSPME. However, comparison of the mean scores elicited the emergence of several trends, which corresponded to qualitative data responses from the interview. Preceptors and athletic training students identify many of the same values as important for their mentoring relationships. Preceptors and athletic training students identify athletic trainers in supervisory positions (head or assistant athletic trainers) as their mentors. Mentoring relationships in clinical education, for both preceptors and students, rely on three consistent themes: 1.) Ongoing support (understanding and encouragement), 2.) Role modeling (professional behaviors and attitudes) and 3.) Interpersonal characteristics (empathy, compassion, communication). Conclusions: The theme of support was evident for continued learning and development of both preceptors and students. Preceptors learn the role of mentor by emulating their previous mentors and rely on their continued support in the formation of their own mentoring strategies. Students view their preceptors as mentors and rely on them for teaching clinical skills as well as learning their role as an athletic trainer. Both groups identify similar interpersonal and professional characteristics such as trust and communication to assist them in connecting with their mentor and forming meaningful relationships. Word Count: 441