

The ATEP Educated Athletic Trainer: Educational satisfaction and technique use within the psychosocial intervention and referral content area

Results: The majority of ATCs were satisfied with their undergraduate education within this content area, with the exception of topics related to psychoses, neuroses, and mental skills training techniques (e.g., mental imagery). Techniques related to goal setting had the highest use frequency, whereas mental skills training had the lowest use frequency.

Conclusions: Athletic training education programs are adequately preparing ATCs in topics related to goal setting and motivational techniques, but may be under-preparing them to implement mental skills training techniques (such as mental imagery, relaxation, self-talk, and cognitive restructuring).

Context: Today's certified athletic trainer (ATC) must address both physical and mental aspects of athletic injury in a holistic rehabilitation program.

Objective: Assess ATCs' satisfaction with educational preparation within the Psychosocial Intervention and Referral (PIR) content area, confidence in using related techniques, and frequency of technique use within clinical settings.

Design: Cross-sectional survey.

Setting: Internet survey methods were used to gather information from ATCs who had been certified for ≤ 7 years.

Participants: 1701 ATCs participated (31.9% response rate). Average years experience: 3.13 (± 1.96). 74% graduated from accredited undergraduate programs, 22% from internship programs, 4% from entry-level Masters programs. 36.1% worked at college/university, 30.7% in private clinic setting, 23.1% at secondary schools.

Main Outcome Measure(s): 15 questions pertaining to satisfaction/confidence with educational experience; 15 questions pertaining to frequency of technique use in clinical setting. Technique use, satisfaction, and confidence were rated on a 9-point Likert scale (technique anchors: *always (1)* and *never (9)*; satisfaction/confidence anchors: *completely satisfied/confident (1)* and *completely dissatisfied/unconfident (9)*). Descriptive statistics and MANOVAs are reported.

Results: Average technique use was 3.58 (± 1.92) for motivation, 6.19 (± 2.16) for self-talk, 6.2 (± 2.06) for relaxation, and 6.53 (± 2.0) for imagery. Significant group difference for edition of educational competencies ($F(45, 2969)=1.848, p<0.001, np^2=0.027$) with ATCs educated under 4th edition reporting more frequent technique use. Significant group difference for route to AT certification ($F(30, 2464)=1.477, p=0.046, np^2=0.018$) with internship-graduate ATCs reporting the most infrequent use of techniques. No significant group difference for clinical setting. Average satisfaction/confidence within motivation was 3.36 (± 2.03), for self-talk was 3.94 (± 2.18), for relaxation was 3.76 (± 2.17), and for imagery was 3.82 (± 2.15). Non-significant group differences were found for all independent variables on satisfaction/confidence: educational competency editions, route to AT certification, or clinical settings.

Conclusions: ATEPs are providing education in most PIR competencies; however, ATCs are not implementing educated techniques in clinical practice. It should be of utmost priority for researchers to investigate and educators to learn how to instruct PIR competencies to promote implementation within clinical settings.

Key Words: mental skills, CAATE, athletic training education