

The Development of Expert Male National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I Certified Athletic Trainers

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Objective: To identify the major influences in the development of expert male National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I certified athletic trainers.

Design and Setting: The participants were individually interviewed, and the data were transcribed and coded.

Subjects: Seven male NCAA Division I certified athletic trainers, who averaged 29 years of experience in the profession and 20 years at the Division I level.

Results: We found 3 higher-order categories that explained the development of the certified athletic trainers and labeled these *meaningful experiences*, *personal attributes*, and *mentoring*. The growth and development of the athletic trainers were

influenced by a variety of meaningful experiences that began during their time as students and continued throughout their careers. These experiences involved dealing with challenging job conditions, educational conditions, and attempts to promote and improve the profession. The personal attributes category encompassed the importance of a caring and service-oriented attitude, building relationships with athletes, and maintaining strong bonds within their own families. Mentoring of these individuals occurred both inside and outside the athletic training profession.

Conclusion: We provide a unique view of the development of athletic trainers that should be of interest to those in the field, regardless of years of experience.

Successful individuals in any field seek environments that are congruent with the characteristics that allow them to express their attitudes and values while best using their skills and abilities.¹ Although the discipline of athletic training has many positive attributes associated with it, athletic trainers must deal with a number of stressors that may include dual responsibilities (eg, head athletic trainer and curriculum director), lack of resources, and high athlete-to-athletic trainer ratios.² The demands can make it difficult for the athletic training professional to stay excited and motivated for an extended period. The question then becomes, "What can be done in the profession of athletic training to ensure that those people who enter the profession are prepared for what awaits them?" Our study is an attempt to address this issue.

Krumboltz and Worthington³ outlined some factors that can help ease the transition for students who are entering the workplace, including the importance of a knowledgeable and respected counselor or mentor. Under the tutelage of this leader, a student's abilities and skills are refined or expanded (or both) in areas such as organization, interpersonal communication, and reasoning.³ After acquiring these skills, students can work specifically in their field of interest, such as health care, electronics, or engineering.³

Research in athletic training has also supported the impor-

tance of mentoring with respect to career transition of young professionals. For example, Curtis et al⁴ found that the clinical experience became more meaningful and beneficial when a supervising athletic trainer or mentor provided guidance and understanding in a given situation. Moreover, the interaction between the student and supervisor positively affected the career development of the student.⁴

During the last 2 decades, studies on the career development patterns of certified athletic trainers (ATCs) have been sparse. Quantitative studies in career development issues have focused on topics such as the quality of supervision in athletic training education programs,⁴ factors that affect the professional lives of athletic trainers,⁵ and the importance of selected employment characteristics.⁶ An alternative method of data acquisition involves using qualitative research methods to emphasize the processes and meanings that are not examined in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency.⁷ Qualitative researchers seek to capture the richness and complexity of individual experiences. For example, *why* are so many ATCs burning out so early in their careers, or *what* attracts individuals to the athletic training profession? The answers to these types of questions can be collected using a number of different qualitative research methods, such as observations, narratives, semiotic analyses, and interviews.⁷