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Southwest Athletic Trainers' Association Free Communications Abstract Presentations

The following abstracts were accepted and presented at the 67th Southwest Athletic Trainers' Association (SWATA) Symposium, 2021.

Athletic Trainers' Perceived Readiness to Recognize Mental Health Symptoms in Student Athletes

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Context: Athletic trainers (AT) may report a lack of confidence in decision-making as they transition to professional practice. There is limited research on how prepared ATs feel managing mental health conditions in athletes. **Objective:** The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived readiness and confidence of master's AT students, transitioning to professional practice, to recognize mental health symptoms and provide appropriate referral strategies. **Design:** Quantitative, descriptive study. **Setting:** Texas master's AT programs. **Patients or Other Participants:** Non-probability consecutive sampling method. The target population was 2nd-year master's AT students in Texas who were eligible to graduate and sit for the BOC. A total of 33 students attempted the electronic survey; 17 met the inclusion criteria and completed the entire survey for a response rate of 61%. **Interventions:** Program directors of AT programs received a recruitment letter asking them to distribute the participant recruitment letter and survey link to their 2nd-year master's AT students. Students completed the survey via SurveyMonkey™. The adapted survey included a set of three vignettes with two associated multiple choice response questions for each vignette, and a binary scale with an additional "Not sure" option for assessing athletic trainer responsibility. A 5-point Likert

scale was created to assess perceived readiness and confidence. Subject matter experts were used to establish face and content validity. **Main Outcome Measures:** Perceived readiness and confidence were the main outcome measures assessed. Identification of the correct mental health symptom and best referral option for each vignette was also assessed. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS Statistics v. 27.0. All data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and appropriate measures of central tendency and dispersion. **Results:** Normality testing was run for the variable, age, using the Shapiro-Wilk test ($p < .001$). The median survey participant age was 23.00 years (IQR= 2; Min/Max = 22, 28) and the majority of students were female ($n = 15$; 88.2%). When asked if ATs were responsible for implementing psychological interventions, 52.9 % ($n = 9$) students incorrectly chose yes and 41.2% ($n = 7$) reported *not sure*. Athletic training students reported preparedness to recognize signs and symptoms of mental health conditions in athletes ($n = 11$; 64.7%), but not as prepared to provide referral strategies. They also *agreed* or *strongly agreed* they had the confidence to identify an athlete in need of a mental health referral ($n = 10$; 58.8%), but lacked confidence to manage the referral. **Conclusions:** AT students perceived readiness and confidence to recognize signs and symptoms of mental health conditions in athletes, but felt unprepared to provide appropriate referrals. The lack of preparedness and confidence may illustrate a need for further instruction in AT education programs.