Clinical Athletic Trainers Decrease Orthopedic Physician Clinical Burden

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Introduction/Context: More than half of physicians in the United States are reporting symptoms of burnout. These symptoms lead to increased risk to patient safety and overall physician health. The use of Certified Athletic Trainers (ATCs) is increasing in popularity, especially in Orthopedic clinics. ATCs in the clinical setting have been shown to allow physicians to focus on patient care and less on clerical and documentation tasks. The goal of this study is to assess if ATCs in the physician practice setting influence physician work-life integration, burnout, and work engagement. Methods/Intervention: Approval obtained by IRB at University of Iowa. An observational, nonrandomized study with data collected from physicians at two time points, 6 months apart. This information included: overall quality of life question, two item burnout survey, work-life balance scale, and physician job satisfaction survey. In addition to data collected from physicians, monthly EPIC ™ signal data was collected and blinded by a research team member. Each provider was divided by use of ATC or no ATC in clinic. These two groups were compared using independent, two-sample t-tests. Analyses were performed using RStudio statistical software. Results: Clinics with ATCs have decreased order contribution for providers as well as decreased portion of notes authored by provider. The average "In Basket" time is significantly lower with ATCs. Additionally, providers who utilize ATCs have significantly less time working in EPIC™ outside of clinical hours per person than those who do not. No significant difference was found between ATC and no-ATC groups in physician work-life balance, job satisfaction, or overall quality of life at time of initial survey and 6-month survey. There was noted to be decreased work engagement scores for those who use ATCs. Discussion: The use of ATCs in physician practice is increasing in popularity with studies demonstrating decreased provider need for clerical and documentation tasks and increased time for providers to focus on patient care. It demonstrated lower amounts of time spent in EPIC ™ outside of clinical hours for those providers who utilize an ATC. In addition to time outside clinical hours, our study found providers have decreased order input and documentation proportions with ATCs. Our study did not show any statistically significant differences in physician work-life balance, job satisfaction, or overall quality of life with use of ATC or no ATCs. Clinical Bottom Line: In this study, the use of ATCs in the orthopedic clinical setting demonstrated decreased amounts of time spent in EMR software outside of clinical hours, decreased order input for physicians, and decreased documentation burden for physicians.