Self-Perceived Educational Preparedness of Entry-Level Athletic Trainers Regarding Preventing Sudden Death in Sport

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**Context:** Sudden death is a constant concern in sport, especially since in many cases the death is preventable. Athletic trainers (ATs) are often the first medical professional on-scene when such a condition occurs; therefore need to be well versed in recognizing and managing these conditions. Recent evidence regarding exertional heat stroke (EHS), a cause of sudden death, indicates a lack of educational training as a factor contributing to implementation of best practices. **Objective:** Understand how athletic training education programs (ATEPs) prepare the athletic training student (ATS) to be competent in emergency care procedures. **Design:** An inductive qualitative study utilizing phone interviewing. **Setting:** Athletic Training Education Programs. **Patients or Other Participants:** Thirteen participants volunteered for the study (7 males, 6 females). In order to gain a holistic view, participants were either first-year entry-level AT or recent ATS graduate prior to employment. The average participant age was 23 ± 2 years. **Data Collection and Analysis:** One-on-one phone interviews following a semi-structured format were conducted with all participants. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and shared with participants prior to analysis. The data was analyzed inductively borrowing from the principles of a grounded theory approach and open coding. Multiple analyst triangulation and peer review were included as steps to establish data credibility. **Results:** One dominant theme emerged from the data to explain how ATEPs prepare their students to be competent regarding emergency care procedures: *compartmentalized*. The theme reflects the participants’ reflections that while they received the cognitive knowledge regarding sudden death in sport, they had minimal hands on practice of those specific skills associated with those conditions. The ATS revealed that educators utilized traditional teaching methods such as lecture and discourse to relay the cognitive knowledge regarding sudden death in sport and laboratory time to provide practice time with basic skills, such as spineboarding and first aid, although the time was limited. The ATS perceived a focus on situations or cases athletic training educators had encountered versus the broader scope of conditions that may cause sudden death. When evaluating the ATS’s ability to critically apply their knowledge and psychomotor skills, little real-life integration was used but rather more contrived, discussion based instructional methods. This limited their self-perceived development of critical thinking and self-efficacy with implementing proper and efficient emergency care procedures. **Conclusions:** Beyond providing the ATS with the necessary knowledge didactically and hands on practice time through structured laboratory sessions, educators must also provide the chance for critical application of this knowledge and skills. Although case studies and simulations are important for initiation of application, the ATS still must be forced to apply the skills as learned to be appropriate to demonstrate competency and critical thinking. In other words, if the simulation requires spineboarding, the ATS, must not only acknowledge it but also execute it. **Word Count:** 460