The benefits of serving as an athletic training clinical preceptor

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Context: Previous research has shown that role strain can develop in athletic training clinical preceptors making it difficult for them to meet the standards of supervising athletic training students (ATSs). Exploring the benefits to serving as a preceptor is important in order to secure appropriate professional role models for ATSs. Objective: To determine the benefits of serving as an athletic training clinical preceptor. Design: Qualitative study. Setting: Athletic Training Education Programs (ATEPs). Patients or Other Participants: Twenty-four preceptors (average age = 32 ± 7 years; 11 male, 13 female; average clinical experience = 9 ± 6 years; average preceptor experience = 5 ± 3 years) volunteered to participate in our study. Participants represented 7 Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education accredited ATEPs from the east coast and found employment in intercollegiate athletics (N = 12) or in secondary schools (N = 12). Data Collection and Analysis: We asked participants to journal responses to open-ended questions through Question Pro™ online survey management. We analyzed data using a general inductive approach and secured credibility by utilizing consistency and stakeholder checks and through a peer review. Results: Three main themes emerged from the data. Preceptors enjoy the personal relationships they build with ATSs. We believe positive interactions between ATSs and preceptors can help socialize ATSs into the professional roles and responsibilities of an athletic trainer. Moreover, preceptors viewed the personal relationships they developed with ATSs as rewarding. The reciprocal learning which occurred while supervising ATSs allowed the preceptors to embrace the opportunity to gain new knowledge to improve patient care. The preceptors felt that ATSs helped them keep their minds and skills fresh by engaging in clinical questioning, discourse, and providing feedback. Several participants also noted that supervision advanced their clinical practice because of the new skills and knowledge required of ATSs and the methods which have evolved since the preceptors were educationally trained. The two-way exchange of knowledge helped the preceptors engage in lifelong learning and advanced the care their patients received. Finally, our participants enjoyed teaching and mentoring the future members of the athletic training profession. The enjoyment our participants found from supervising ATSs is noteworthy as early integration into the clinical site can help give ATSs a sense of belonging and positively influence persistence. Enjoyment in teaching and mentoring also helped our preceptors manage role strain, a common challenge associated with the responsibilities of serving as a preceptor. Conclusions: Identifying, training, and retaining skilled preceptors is important for ATEPs in order to properly socialize ATSs to their future professional roles. Program directors should explain the benefits of supervising ATSs to prospective preceptors as a means to recruit and retain appropriate professional role models. Finding unique and attractive benefits for those serving as preceptors may help keep morale high and aid in providing a positive environment to foster student learning. Future investigations should continue to investigate the
experiences of preceptors in order to keep them invested in mentoring ATSs.  **Key Words**: Clinical instructor, mentor, clinical education.  **Word Count**: 499.