



TATS T-Blast News May 8, 2013

Choices

The Evidence-Based Gap

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Athletic training is a growing profession and as the profession has grown, so has the number of Athletic Training Programs. One of the more difficult problems facing Programs today is the gap between what students are learning in the classroom and what they are being shown in their clinical experiences. As the expectation for evidence-based practice increases, the gap between the evidence taught in the didactic aspect of the Program and those skills demonstrated clinically continues to widen. These discrepancies can lead to conflict and stress, which can interfere with learning and the quality of the clinical experience.

The predicament is a two-way street. On one side, students want to learn; therefore, they ask questions. We want our Preceptors to understand that these inquiries are not meant to question their authority, but to better understand why things are done a certain way. We are drilled by professors to have a reason for everything that we do. But often times, when we ask for a reason from the Preceptor, he or she immediately become defensive. Such an environment leaves little room for discussion or growth. On the other side, students must learn that there is a time, place, and effective approach to asking questions. Drilling a preceptor in front of patients, coaches, or during a rushed moment, could jeopardize trust and rapport.

How can we overcome these barriers? There are ways to create learning environments that build relationships, rather than tear them down. For starters, everyone needs to check pride and egos at the door. It is impossible to understand another's point of view when one is buried in "self". Be respectful. Questions asked (from both sides of the relationship) should lead to healthy debate, discussion, and growth. We must remember that the highest priority is to provide quality health care to the patient. Effective communication skills, including active listening, tone, and body language are critically important for a healthy Preceptor-Athletic Training Student relationship. A student should always remember that the Preceptor is credentialed, licensed and has gained invaluable experience from which you will learn. If you have a question, respectfully ask him or her at an appropriate time and place. Remember, there is much more to the story than what our textbooks provide. Yet, scientific evidence, along with experience and patient preference, must guide clinical decisions. Present the evidence to the Preceptor with respect and sincerity and then ask to discuss the possibilities of alternative treatment options. With the overwhelming volume of evidence that is published in journal articles monthly, one way a Preceptor can keep current is to encourage students to bring in and discuss new information on a specific topic. This is beneficial for students in searching the literature and summarizing the findings, and also saves time for the busy Preceptor. Preceptors can also schedule regular meetings with students to discuss student goals, strengths, weaknesses and case-specific details. When students know that there will be scheduled times for discussion, the urgency to ask questions on the spur of the moment will decrease.

Above all else let's remember that this is a team approach to learning where the mentor and the student have equal responsibility and investment. Embracing the "Golden Rule" can go a long ways in building and improving relationships and could help to bridge the evidence-based gap.