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Paying the Price for Exercise Physiology Professionalism

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It stands to reason that if thought and faith, prayer, hope and appreciation are anything at all, they are definite; and if they are definite, they must be specific; if they are specific, then they unquestionably must accomplish their desire.

-- Ernest Holmes

THIS IS AN ARTICLE FOR everyone who wants to be an exercise physiologist. It contains the ideas of change written from an exercise physiologist's perspective. To read it is to set the stage for change and work towards professional development in exercise physiology. Written in a simple to read words, this article speaks to the future of exercise physiology as a healthcare profession. It shows us how to activate who we are, what we think, and what is expected of us.

Ask yourself this question: As a recent graduate with a major in exercise physiology, do you look forward to the day when society recognizes you as a healthcare professional and not as a personal trainer? Or, as an exercise physiologist teaching in an exercise science department, are you wondering why the department chair and the faculty in general have not spread their wings and renamed the department and academic degree to exercise physiology?

As a college teacher for 46 years I can tell you that almost every time I am asked by friends or colleagues about my work, they ask "What sport do you coach?" As usual, I say: "No, I am not a coach of a sport. I am an exercise physiologist. I teach

If exercise physiologists are seeking to be recognized in healthcare, they must tell themselves that they have faith in their practice of exercise physiology, and in the certainty of exercise medicine to promote health and well-being.

courses such as cardiorespiratory physiology, gross anatomy (with cadaver dissection), exercise metabolism, psychophysiology, and electrocardiography to mention a few.” Their response is usually, “Oh, really? Exercise physiologist!” Society has heard of exercise physiologists, but so has the medical community. The problem is that neither knows what exercise physiologists do? Yet, everyone understands and acknowledges the titles -- nurse, physical therapist, and athletic trainer.

So, what is the problem? It is simple as saying that exercise physiology as a career is well known in academia, but not elsewhere. Why? Primarily because the academic exercise physiologists think of themselves as researchers and everyone knows that research is driven by the doctorate prepared degree. This thinking has limited the freedom of college graduates with an undergraduate degree in exercise physiology. That is why the seed of freedom must be planted in academia, but first the academic exercise physiologists must realize they are responsible for the growth and credibility of exercise physiology.

To learn this point is to learn the importance of exercise physiology, for our work on behalf of what we are lays the foundation of freedom through professionalism. It follows then exercise physiologists cannot say, “I’m too busy doing research to think about our own professional organization.” Change is not about one person, but rather the collective effort of all exercise physiologists. There is a power in the men and women who come together in faith to manifest a new door to opportunities and

possibilities. The science of change is exactly this point, especially since we must learn to take responsibility for our own future through our own eyes and dreams. Along the way, we will find a better place for our work and a higher standard for all exercise physiologists.

What we outwardly are, and what we are to become depends upon what we are thinking.

-- Ernest Holmes

This thinking we must believe. Remember, Jesus summed up this point in this statement: “It is done unto you as you believe.” And so we are exercise physiologists worthy of society’s attention as long as we believe we are. Thus, we must immerse ourselves in knowing and thinking about the sum total of all we believe we can be. Our belief is everything and more! This is a far-reaching thought. Exercise physiologists must make the time to scrutinize their past, present, and future expectations and gifts that only they can give to themselves. The more they consciously allow for personal expression of exercise physiologists as healthcare professionals, the more completely they believe it the more powerful they will become in helping society grow stronger and more durable with less disease and disability.

The realization that we have the scientific training to prescribe exercise medicine better than other healthcare professionals must be gained by the application of our research and knowledge. Hence, once academic exercise physiologists’ link research

with healthcare and exercise physiology as a profession, then, the realization of career opportunities will be their students' reward. But, they must discover what to believe in and why they believe in it, as has been the case with the leadership of the American Society of Exercise Physiologists and its membership. In time, the world will grow tired of non-professionals as has been demonstrated with the forerunners of PT, OT, and AT.

It follows that everything has a beginning. To suppose that exercise physiology is different would be to suppose that it is supreme to everything else, which simply isn't true. Since it no different from other healthcare professions that have been working in accordance with society's thinking and expectations of healthcare professionals, exercise physiologists cannot avoid the same kind of professional manifestation. In time, the discipline will always be made manifest as a profession as long as there is a collective conscious effort to evolve and earn the attributes of self-choice and autonomy.

We must become actively constructive and forward thinking to move from a research discipline to a healthcare profession.

Here, exercise physiologists must recall that their reality is not in the views of others, nor some afar off generic organization, but within themselves. So without trying to make any attempt to explain to a colleague, it is enough to make the statement: "Exercise physiology is a profession of healthcare practitioners that requires its own professional organization." This thinking is important. It is almost certain that exercise physiology as a healthcare profession will not survive beyond the doctorate title if not linked to its own professional organization.

The fundamental premise upon which professionalism is taught and comprehended by members of a profession is one of higher thoughts and nobler deeds. It is not about money or making more money, however important. Professionalism is built upon a certain belief about what is (in this case) exercise physiology, an acceptance that exercise physiologists have a unique scientific training that separates them from other healthcare professionals, and the trust and conviction that comes with having faith in physical, mental, and spiritual treatment that is specific to each client and patient. It is beneficial in that it improves the mind and body and removes the doubt and fear of doing something wrong.

In sum, because our work towards professionalism brings forth something that is better than what exercise physiologists was yesterday. Today, exercise physiologists are less possessed by the failed promises of non-exercise physiologists and more willing to hook up with their own thoughts and ideas. In the end, they will be able to bring greater possibilities and happier conditions to their work. Thus, to a considerable degree exercise physiologists are resolutely turning away from status quo, which continues to be negative, and from other experiences that have kept exercise physiology from growing. In the end, it is inevitable that the day shall come when the

understanding and cooperation will be recognized between the medical doctors and exercise physiologists. But, until then, they must believe in themselves, their work, and their determination and capacity to sustain the transition from discipline to profession.

Every evolving profession must pay the price for that which it receives and that price is paid in work, new experiences, and the will of its members to fully express themselves to realize their destiny.