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Dare to Join ASEP

Tommy Boone, PhD, MPH, MAM, MBA
Board Certified Exercise Physiologist

The very first condition of lasting happiness is that a life should be full of purpose, aiming at something outside self.

-- Hugh Black

Take a look at the often misunderstood term “exercise physiology.” In the eyes of many academics and students alike throughout the world, the “exercise science” degree has come to be known as an “exercise physiology” degree. Part of this problem is the desire of non-exercise physiologists to be more than what they are. Another part of the problem exists with the academic exercise physiologists who are doing very little to define and promote the profession of exercise physiology. The fact that anyone with a related degree (e.g., exercise science, kinesiology, sports science, human performance) can call him- or herself an exercise physiologist diminishes the profession of exercise physiology.

If it is not obvious, it should be. There is a huge difference in academic course work, laboratory training, and professional expectations between exercise science and exercise physiology. Armed with this basic truth, and with the desire to reach out, to give, to build, and to help others understand, the ASEP leadership laid the foundation for success and a positive opportunity for growth and stability. In fact, let me clarify here and now what the ASEP leaders believe is exercise physiology.

Exercise Physiology is the identification of physiological mechanisms underlying physical activity and regular exercise, the comprehensive delivery of treatment services concerned with the analysis, improvement, and maintenance of physical and mental health and fitness, the prevention and treatment of major diseases, and the professional guidance and counsel of athletes and others interested in athletics and sports training.

The ASEP definition is comprehensive and to the point. Obviously, exercise physiology is not just about cardiac rehabilitation. Also, the definition puts to rest the idea that exercise physiology is the study of acute and chronic responses and adaptations to regular exercise. In fact, the power of regular exercise as an effective treatment modality is so great that it covers essentially all of life. When in the hands of exercise physiologists who understand the scientific ideas and concepts that undergird psycho-physiological testing and training, the treatment if not prevention of major lifestyle diseases becomes the reality of clients and patients alike. This reality is also the means to which the board certified exercise physiologist (EPC) has access to an excellent career opportunity as an entrepreneur-oriented healthcare professional.

In time, the ASEP-EPCs will exist throughout the United States as owners of their own healthcare businesses with the expertise to measure and evaluate the mind-body factors that promote and distract from health, well-being, and longevity. Just imagine the power and commitment in safely designing and overseeing regular exercise as treatment for coronary artery disease, high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure, stroke, obesity, type 2 diabetes, some forms of cancer, osteoporosis, osteoarthritis, low back pain, asthma, COPD, stress, anxiety, depression, and dementia. It is no wonder that certain established healthcare practitioners want to be “the” leaders in prescribing “exercise is medicine.”

Point in fact though, the correct term is “exercise medicine” and the only extensively educated group of professionals who should administer exercise medicine is the exercise physiologist. It is not the exercise science graduate, nor the sports science or kinesiology graduate. Only a certain percent of the graduates from the so-called “related degree programs” is sufficiently educated to perform as an exercise physiologist. When that is the case and when they, as EPC candidates, after passing the exam, then, they can earn the professional title, Board Certified Exercise Physiologist. At that point in time, they will be held accountable to the ASEP Code of Ethics and the ASEP Professional Standards of Practice in order to provide a professional, credible, and safe service to the public sector.

Clearly, without exception, exercise physiologists (particularly the college teachers) need to stop dancing to the music of their fears. After all, what kind of a professional are they when they pompously reflect on their research success but turn a blind eye to their “exercise science” students’ inability to locate a credible job after college? Research is important, but what kind of an academic life is it when the professors or ever-growing and being rewarded while the students remain trapped in the 20th century? Why not recognize the problem now and resolve that change has to take place? The professors cannot continue to sit back and isolate themselves from the decades of wrong values.

The price of professionalism is high. There can be no compromise. The professor’s willingness to call a spade a spade is the vital spark that will promote exercise physiology as a healthcare profession. It is the blueprint for success. It is self-discipline. It is not a surrendering to something different as some academics think. Rather, it is the desire to not settle for mediocrity. Exercise science is not exercise physiology. Professional success of

academic exercise physiologists is not dependent just on their research publications. Why this isn't obvious is hard to understand. Yes, there is a risk in pursuing one's dreams. Yes, it is difficult work. It is not imagined. It is real, and it has consequences. But, that is the price of freedom, especially if we are to control and grow our profession.

It is time to be proud of what exercise physiologists have accomplished. It is time create the image they want to project to those with whom they will work with. In order to do this, it is very important to understand that the professionalization of exercise physiology is totally in the hands of every exercise physiologist. In short, repeat "It all depends on me, what I do, how I do it, and when I do it." So, why not be passionate about giving, building, and creating the 21st century healthcare profession that is responsible for prescribing exercise medicine? Think about it. Do you have what it takes to join the ASEP organization? Do you have the courage and conviction to do what is necessary to speak with passion about ASEP?

All of us need a purpose in life. Why not look to ASEP as your purpose in life? Why not do what you can to promote the organization? Doing so is likely to help you feel happier, stronger, and more energized. Do you have the desire and courage to take that step? If so, then, it is just a matter of time that the change process will reveal a "new" and "vital" profession. It seems that this is the point of William E. Holler's statement: "You can do what you want to do, accomplish what you want to accomplish, attain any reasonable objective you may have in mind – not all of a sudden, perhaps not in one swift and sweeping act of achievement – but you can do it gradually, day by day and play by play, if you want to do it, if you work to do it, over a sufficiently long period of time."

If you are an academic exercise physiologist, believe that you can make a difference, and you will. There is no time for defeat or negative thinking. Be positive and join the ASEP organization with the expectation of being a winner. Remember, "If you think you can or can't, you are right." It is all about helping college students achieve and accomplish their goals in life. This means college teaching is about giving and helping more than getting. The more teachers understand teaching is all about serving students, the more they will realize answers to the question: "What am I and why am I here?" When understood from a servant point of view, the work of teaching builds the teacher and the student, builds credible careers for both, and builds greater confidence in the profession of exercise physiology.

The power, beauty, and effectiveness of this thinking does not allow for indifference. For that reason, the passionate believer in ASEP takes the importance of professionalism and exercise physiology seriously. They understand the importance of trying and doing for all the right reasons. They get that some things will be accomplished while others will take time and more time. There is no need to think that change itself must be in a hurry. It would be naïve indeed to think ASEP can correct decades of failed rhetoric in 20 or even 40 years. Thus, there is no reason to get in a hurry. Just learn the importance of staying

the course! Do you have the courage to help illuminate and/or enlighten some of the indifferent people who seem dedicated to imperfection and status quo?

The need for mentally strong and a long unblinking appraisal of “what is exercise physiology” and “who is an exercise physiologist” is big. Admittedly, it seems, if we are a product of our attitudes, then, all we need to do is think as professionals. That is, if we think we are personal trainers, we are going to be personal trainers. If we think we are healthcare professionals, we are going to be healthcare professionals. If we continue to think as we have for decades, we are going to stay the same. If, on the other hand, our college professors start to demonstrate the attitude, discipline, dedication, and concern for helping their students locate credible healthcare jobs after college, which is supposed to be their responsibility, the students’ college education will be worth it. Point in fact: the time for this is long since past.

I challenge every exercise physiologist to step up to the plate and help create the success story for all of us. It will be hard work, but it will also be a rich eye-opening experience. It is utterly nonsensical to not do something productive on behalf of the students who are trapped in exercise science. Why not help them become their dream – a board certified exercise physiologist? Why not make a difference in the life of the students? Why not do so regardless of how difficult it might be? Change isn’t easy, but it is possible. Start today and become part of the solution rather than continuing to conform to the dogma of yesterday’s thinking. You can make a difference by joining ASEP and by putting yourself on the line to get others to understand that exercise physiology is a career and profession, not just a job in a fitness facility.

The only reason for your existence is not what you’re going to get out of life, but what you are going to put into it.

-- Tom Dooley

The Night They Burned the Mountain