

Professionalization of Exercise Physiology^{online}

ISSN 1099-5862

October 2014
Vol 17 No 10

American Society of Exercise Physiologists
The Professional Organization of Exercise Physiologists

What's In It for Me?

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RECENTLY, I asked an exercise physiologist if he would join the ASEP organization and help with the professionalization of exercise physiology. After a brief pause, his response was this: "Getting involved with ASEP is too risky. I am not tenured. The status quo is too powerful. Those in charge are not interested in changing how they think or what they do. Anyway, what's in it for me?"

The most significant contribution we can make to the long-term development of exercise physiology is to help our colleagues change and grow. Every great idea begins with imagination and belief that what is merely an image at the beginning will grow into the desired outcome. We are the means to finding constructive ways of encouraging the free flow of ideas and sensitivity to the need for our own organization. Hence, all we need to do is to believe in our future as exercise physiologists and simply do not allow anyone say otherwise, regardless of talent, position, or training.

As CEO and founder of PhysioLogic Human Performance Systems, the ASEP President, Shane Paulson, a board certified exercise physiologist, is a business-oriented healthcare professional. He promotes health and well-being by safely prescribing exercise medicine to his clients. Shane understands that change is an endless journey of caring, commitment, and energy.

Since 1997, when the now President of St. Scholastica paid a lawyer to incorporate ASEP as a non-profit professional organization in Minnesota, the collective will of the leadership, like that of Shane Paulson, has continued to work on behalf of the students of exercise physiology. What I know for certain is that their vision of exercise physiology is making a difference. Exercise physiology is no longer just the study of acute and chronic responses and adaptations to exercise.

To make a difference and to have an impact on our profession as credible healthcare practitioners, we must venture out and take a strong stand for who we are. We must think beyond the research perspective, however important. Nothing great will be achieved by doing things the way they have been done for decades. Sports medicine, exercise science, human performance, sports science, kinesiology and dozens of other degree programs are not exercise physiology.

The ASEP definition of “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 (including, but not limited to, coronary artery disease, hypertension, obesity, type 2 diabetes, some forms of cancer, osteoporosis, depression), and the professional guidance and counsel of athletes and others interested in athletics and sports training.”

Change begins from within, regardless of where we are in our education or work. Change is all about passion, responsibility, and a vision of something better. Leaders throughout the health and fitness business industry, such as Jessica Sunier, who is a board certified exercise physiologist specializes in clients with special needs. She is the owner of FitPOWER in Milwaukee, WI. Jessica understands that exercise medicine is the key to a healthy life, and it is the key to sustaining her healthcare business and financial stability.

Healthcare professionals recognize they are part of employment opportunities that require an uncommonly complex knowledge base that directly benefits human beings of all ages. They recognize that if they don't control their destiny, others will do so. Yes, there is a risk to speaking out. It is not imagined. It is real, and it has consequences. Yet, that is the price of freedom, especially if we are to control and grow our profession.

To surrender your hopes and dreams to comments like, “When you graduate you can apply to physical therapy” isn't just bad, it borders on unethical behavior when the professors know that they are doing zero to make the undergraduate degree a career-driven profession. Therefore, to protect themselves, the college professors (as academic advisors) have unknowingly agreed to acknowledge the undergraduate degree program as a transitional degree to the established healthcare professions. While the non-exercise physiology degree may not be completely useless, it is not a career-driven academic degree that allows for financial stability. Thus, in short, the 40 or more similar academic majors are vague undergraduate degrees with little intrinsic value beyond locating a job as a trainer or a fitness instructor.

This outcome should not be the purpose of a college degree. But, remember, as Dr. Rollo May, the distinguished psychiatrist, wrote in his wonderful book called, *Man's Search for Himself*, “The opposite of courage is not cowardice, it is conformity.” The failure to talk, write, and research about the thousands of students who end up spending huge sums of money on tuition and living expenses to find themselves without a credible

job after college is a major problem that is linked to unprofessional behavior on part of the status quo.

Why not devote more time to a shared understanding of the future, especially when it comes to the hopes and dreams of our students? What matters isn't just a college degree, but one that will make a difference in finding a credible job in healthcare. This means that just as nurses graduate with a nursing degree, exercise physiologists must graduate with an exercise physiology degree! This is a major reason why ASEP was founded, that is, to shape our destiny by exercise physiologists and not by non-exercise physiologists.

As my colleague Dr. Gary Gordon at the College of St. Scholastica said prior to his passing, "Why not dare to make a difference in the face of indifference?" I know that he made a difference with the students that he taught. More than anything, he encouraged them to believe in possibilities and to live their dreams, especially when they were afraid to break out of their existing behaviors. In fact, Gary shared with me that some of his students had learned to play it safe so often that they existed in the dysfunctional state of indifference.

I challenge you, if not today, then, at some critical point in the near future that you will rise above the indifference and dare to challenge the failed rhetoric of today's conformity? After all, why shouldn't we live exercise physiology as it should be lived, to realize a better future for all of us as credible healthcare professionals, and to promote exercise physiology career opportunities as other healthcare professions promote their career-specific jobs?

It is not about "what's in it for me," but rather the unfolding of professionalism in exercise physiology for all exercise physiologists as healthcare professionals. Or, as Brian Tracy said, "Successful people are always looking for opportunities to help others. Unsuccessful people are always asking "What's in it for me?" Seriously, too many people cling to "what is common" by turning a deaf ear to new ideas. You can hear them saying, "It'll never work." "You will only create trouble for yourself."

Eventually, we all learn that we create our own reality. Jesus summed up when he said in Matthew 9:29, "It is done unto you as you believe." Obviously, there are people who have not perceived the truth in this thinking. They are not willing to let their inner thoughts guide them. Yet, the truth is that whatever we think, believe in, feel, visualize, read, and talk about shapes our destiny.

Dr. Gordon, originally a physical therapist who became an exercise physiologist, would say, "Why not dare to "get involved" in the professionalization of exercise physiology?" Or, as Dr. David Spierer of Long Island University of Brooklyn, NY would comment (from his ASEP accredited program): "Why not accept that being odd is okay when your time and service is for the students of the profession of exercise physiology?" The point is this: "Why not become part of the solution rather than conforming to the dogma of today?" That way, all of us would be in position to see exercise physiology as the newest 21st century healthcare profession?"

Ernest Holmes said it this way in his great book, *The Science of Mind*, “Never limit your view of life by any past experience. The possibility of life is inherent within the capacity to imagine what life is, backed by the power to produce this imagery. It is simply a question of sticking to an idea until it becomes a tangible reality.”

As ASEP exercise physiologists work for change, they deny and minimize the influence of others to shape and control their future. This is done by acknowledging the existence of contradictions that are obvious with the opposition. For, after all, the future of “who we are” is linked to our freedom to act and to speak out rather than being silent. You can make a difference by supporting the ASEP organization?

Although we live in a world that wants everything right now, change doesn’t happen overnight. But, with the right state of mind, it will happen in accordance with our willingness to put ourselves on the line to get others to understand that exercise physiology is a career and profession, not just a job. The evolution of exercise physiology cannot be left to chance. Remember the adage, “If one fails to plan, one plans to fail.”

There is no substitute for personal and professional planning and ownership of our profession. Hence, it is important not to allow generic organization define who we are and what we do in the public sector. Frankly, that is why the ASEP leadership created the first-ever definition of “who is an exercise physiologist,” as well as the first-ever exercise physiology code of ethics, academic accreditation guidelines, board certification, and standards of professional practice.

Or, as T. Siedner said, “There is no more neutrality in the world. You either have to be part of the solution, or you’re going to be part of the problem.” I think his statement is right on. As a student or a teacher/researcher, why not take responsibility for promoting exercise physiology as a healthcare profession? Why not stand up, speak out, and stop colluding in silence with status quo? In other words, why not become part of the solution? Why not help friends and colleagues to imagine something better, to dream something better, and to live something better?

Perhaps, we should also remember that ASEP was founded just 17 years ago compared to the founding of the American College of Sports Medicine ... 60 years ago, the American Physical Therapy Association ... 93 years ago, the American Occupational Therapy Association ... 97 years ago, the American Nurses Association ... 118 years ago, and the American Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance ... 129 years ago.

The change process isn’t something that happens quickly. It requires decades of reflection, creativity, and freedom. Change is synonymous with time, perseverance, and discipline. When we decide to think as other healthcare professionals do, we will start living as they do and, then, we will become our vision. Ernest Holmes said it this way, “Know your own mind. Train yourself to think what you wish to think; be what you wish to be; feel what you wish to feel, and place no limit on Principle!”

Every time I read this quote, I think of Dr. Frank Wyatt of Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls, TX. He is not only responsible for the undergraduate exercise physiology degree being accredited by ASEP, but has also done what was necessary to accredit the first-ever ASEP exercise physiology master's degree in the United States at Midwestern. Being in charge of your own mind isn't necessarily easy, especially when the world wants us to conform to something we are not. All I can say is, "Thank you Dr. Wyatt for the work you are doing on behalf of our profession.

So, in closing, the bottom line is this: It is common knowledge that people resist change. That's just the way the world works. Those of us who are moving on should carry the best of the past into the future. We must think positive, and never give up our dream of something better, especially that of prescribing exercise medicine as exercise physiology healthcare professionals. It is our product line with excellent career opportunities for entrepreneurial-oriented exercise physiologists who serve clients and patients of all ages.