

Professionalization of Exercise Physiology^{online}

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The Importance of Participation

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The inherent dignity of a person is violated when his free spirit is oppressed or manipulated.

-- Robert H. Schuller

Without question, exercise physiologists understand the importance of research. They have displayed a preoccupation with publishing research articles for decades. Academic exercise physiologists have succeeded very well and, therefore, deserve the respect of the scientific community. But, to get straight to the point of this article, it isn't surprising that publishing research articles about the physiology of exercise and/or sports training is popular. After all, exercise physiology is an offspring of physical education, sports, and athletics. The question is this: When are exercise physiologists going to seek confirmation of their arrival into the ranks of the healthcare profession by writing professionalism articles? When are the academic exercise physiologists going to take the time to write about the professional challenges and concerns faced by their students?

We need exercise physiologists to write, talk, and present lectures on the importance of participation, including the topic of professionalism. Why are we so short on doing this? Where are we going to find them?

There exists an agreed-upon body of scientific knowledge, informed by systematic research effort that is indispensable to the practice of exercise physiology. Board certified exercise physiologists have earned the ASEP credential that defines their exercise

physiology practice in the public sector. This professional commitment to public service is acknowledged as a founding principle of the ASEP vision. To this end, writing about and refining professionalism in exercise physiology are as important as publishing research articles. Given the ASEP vision for the future, it would seem very appropriate to conclude that writing about professionalism is presently more important than continuing to publish only research articles. And yet, there are obvious claims of disinterestedness in writing about professionalism in exercise physiology by new and old exercise physiologists. My gut instinct is to treat such thinking as a major concern for all ASEP members. Similarly, the deprofessionalization or the systematic de-skilling of jobs that exercise physiology students apply for after college, such as a personal trainer and fitness instructor, bears resemblance to applicants without a college degree.

No doubt you have heard the expression, “Deliver us from evil.” In spite of the belief that it is appropriate for generic organizations to promote a personal trainer certification, the concern is whether it is ethical. After all, it is an “open secret” among exercise physiologists that it doesn’t substantially benefit the college graduate. Yet, given this is the case, where is the institutional self-criticism? Where is the scrupulous self-regulation or influence of the academic exercise physiologists when it comes to the universal standards shared by all healthcare professionals? Where is the self-regulation of exercise physiology by its own members? Where is the academic community of exercise physiologists to sustain the commitment to critical thinking about exercise physiology?

Everyone thinks of writing research articles, but no one thinks of publishing a professional development article.

Why aren’t they working with ASEP to elevate the status of exercise physiologists as healthcare professionals?

Why aren’t they working on behalf of the college graduates to increase their wealth, status, and power?

The questions bring up an important point. Why aren’t ASEP exercise physiologists writing about the need for professionalism in exercise physiology and all of the underlying factors, issues, and challenges that go with it? Why aren’t they interested in publishing in PEPonline? Perhaps, it is as simple as saying, “It is a waste of my precious time.” If so, is such a comment appropriate? Tragically, when exercise physiologists could help with the promotion of professionalism in exercise physiology, instead they turn a blind eye to doing

so. The self-perception that the only thing important is to publish more research articles is an illusion that prevents many exercise physiologists from acknowledging their true responsibilities to the evolving profession. This false consciousness of their role as a college teacher (in particular) weakens the ASEP voice for all exercise physiologists. In the end, regardless of the exercise physiologist's academic position, his or her thinking cannot be viewed as appropriate. However, it is clear that since the founding of ASEP only few exercise physiologists have stayed the course as sustainable leaders in the professionalization of exercise physiology. Why is it so hard to see that the trade-offs and compromises inherent in virtually every aspect of ASEP are made in a forward-looking vision for everyone who has an interest in exercise physiology?

It should be clear that the power of a healthcare profession to define the standards that govern the delivery of its services goes to the heart of its leaders.

In this case, the authority of the exercise physiology profession resides in its exclusive capacity to set the

terms of what contributes to the professional development of exercise physiologists. This monopoly of what is exercise physiology and who is an exercise physiologist is the right of the ASEP organization and its leadership. This is also why it is expected of the leadership to write about and publish their thoughts regarding "public issues" and other items of "newsworthiness" that empowers or distracts from the reality of exercise physiology as defined by the ASEP as the professional organization of exercise physiologists. Hence, given this thinking as critical in supporting the ASEP perspective, it isn't a stretch of the imagination to expect the leadership and the membership to participate in disseminating material that supports professionalism. After all, writing about professionalism, the need for it, and the means by which to sustain it is often promoted by a clear image of ideas and expectations described in published articles.

In no sense therefore is it reasonable to excuse exercise physiologists from participating in the good will "writing efforts" that help to turn the ASEP vision into a reality by changing how people think, by lessening the probability of resistance, and communicating a new strategy and/or philosophy. This obligation is binding on all

The evidence is all around us. We live it every day. The fact is it is actually impossible to change a person's mindset. You can only try to influence their thinking.

members of the ASEP organization for the duration of their membership. There is no immunity of one's involvement when he or she is an ASEP member. A similar distinction pervades the basic standards of thinking when one is a member of another professional organization. Hence, it becomes very important to argue that just as people and machines have to work together to serve each other successfully, the process of writing and publishing professionalism articles in PEPonline is a professional necessity. Otherwise, how is it possible for a person to actually demonstrate faith in ASEP if he or she isn't willing to take the time to support its electronic journals? A commitment of faith in ASEP is a commitment of time and critical thinking that promotes professionalism in exercise physiology.

The tragedy of exercise physiologists who aren't willing to share their thoughts and ideas in a professional article is the unfortunate lost opportunity to share their thinking with others. Just as it is important to publish not one or 40 but a 100 or more articles on the cardiovascular effects of different training programs, exercise physiologists must also look for the opportunity to express their expertise in professionalization articles. Doing so encourages professionalization in exercise physiology. It shouldn't be viewed as an

Taking and writing about professionalism in exercise physiology move us towards what we want rather than what we do not want.

intrusion on their time, but rather as a legitimate responsibility to support the prevailing standards of the ASEP community. On the other hand, rationalization is consistent with the behavior that fails to address the immediate problems of exercise physiology. In short, it is all about cultivating a unique and personal voice that

is fundamental to the relevant issues of actual experience by non-doctorate exercise physiologists.

To be willing to try something new is at the heart of breakthrough thinking. It is singly and collectively the search for solutions to the exercise physiologists' problems. It should be obvious that the ASEP view of exercise physiology is about professionalism and, yes, research and without a doubt -- "exercise as medicine." If ASEP is to serve as a mediator for the profession, then, the shared history of organizational development should reflect the key issues that undergird professionalization. Raising concerns about the use and impact of exercise as medicine parallels other healthcare advances in preventing

disease and disability. A vision of this kind could not evolve into exercise physiology as a profession without a vision that is grounded in the setting of standards in the education of exercise physiologists. Hence, if ASEP is to fulfill the functions of a professional organization and its obligations to its members, the leadership is ethically responsible for addressing professionalism issues and concerns. Not only is this thinking integral to understanding the historical development of exercise physiology, it speaks to the care and accountability of all ASEP members.

Articles about what is exercise physiology, who is an exercise physiologist, and what are the exercise physiologist's ethical guidelines in provided care, and what are the services provided by an exercise physiologist are essential to the role and clarification of the exercise physiologist's in the public sector. Thus, the sole purpose of advancing exercise physiology as a profession through PEPonline articles is a social activity carried out by exercise physiologists. Admittedly, it is only one form of social influence but it certainly is an important one. Where else is the role of the exercise physiology profession (or any profession) going to agree on standards of practice except through analysis and debate within the context of published articles? Where are they going to set and agree on an ethical course of action except within the context of a professional journal? These points should be obvious. If ASEP leaders want to achieve the significant change that is needed in exercise physiology, they must achieve "a paradigm shift in thinking." They must start thinking differently so that they can write and publish professionalism articles. The opportunities for learning are incredible. Professionalism articles provide members with ideas and insights to nurture them onto the next level, help them with questions about a policy or practice at their institution, and deal with discrepancies in skills and knowledge.

Most exercise physiologists don't know what to think about a code of ethics, board certification, and standards of practice, but they do know what they want...because they are tired of being trainers and instructors.

The exercise physiologist's claim to the healthcare profession is not a one-shot affair. It doesn't begin or end with the founding of a professional organization or that of attending a national ASEP meeting once a year. It is a continuous process in which the credentials and claims to competence are discussed and tested every day. Evidence of the difficulties

of developing a profession is redundant on a daily basis. Knowledge-based work, that is, the work of a board certified exercise physiologist is by its very nature subject to the application of a formalized body of knowledge. This is particularly evident in the case of

If your heart is in writing about professionalism, the work is an act of love.

physical therapy, occupational therapy, athletic training, and nursing where by their formalized body of knowledge leads to accountability via specialized certifications and/or licensure. It is precisely this point that required the ASEP

leaders to develop certification and accreditation guidelines to support the dimensions of professional work beyond their interest in research. This point of view is an important feature of other professions, and it is closely interwoven into the fabric of modern healthcare groups that create knowledge, formulate procedures, and apply principles on a large-scale basis to promote change.

The power and autonomy from within a professional organization is linked directly to the members' participation in certification and accreditation guidelines, code of ethics and the expectation, role, and status of the board certified exercise physiologist. A profession is practiced on a full-time basis. Just as its body of knowledge can only be acquired by a university education that is linked to standards of permissible practice to control entry into the field, practitioners must continually be informed by concepts and ideas indispensable to the exercise physiology practice. Much of this information, including ethical codes of professional conduct, is derived from professionalism articles to help promote healthcare credentials and quality of performance. Understandably, this topic may seem on the surface as an obvious fact, but it isn't. Only a few exercise physiologists have participated in the publication of professionalism articles.

Success is not a secret. It is hard work and commitment. More often than not, it is doing those things we not want to do.