

# Professionalization of Exercise Physiology<sup>online</sup>

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## A Choice Confronts Us: You Can Make a Difference!

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**A** choice confronts all exercise physiologists, particularly the academic exercise physiologists. They must come together to support their own professional organization. To do so requires making a decision to act which is the opposite of social apathy because it takes courage to step away from status quo. In fact, it is imperative that all exercise physiologists take action now and not later. They can no longer turn a blind eye or withdraw from helping the ASEP organization grow due to inaction from hiding behind the statement, “I do not want to get involved.” Yet, if we do not learn to understand the forces of change at work, standing quietly to avoid the opposition of failed rhetoric is sure to result in more failure.

In fact, I am convinced that if academic exercise physiologists continue to turn a deaf ear to the existence of ASEP and the need to grow exercise physiology as a healthcare profession, they will forfeit their students’ chances of being recognized as “the” healthcare professionals to prescribe exercise medicine. Instead, the students at graduation will continue to be told by their academic advisors to complete an application to graduate school or apply to a different degree program altogether. This means more tuition debt that is already a huge problem throughout the United States. It isn’t appropriate or even ethical for exercise physiologists throughout the academic system to avoid the commitment to the professionalization of exercise physiology (1).

I understand it is easy to avoid criticism by saying nothing and doing nothing, but such a path is wrong and inexcusable. Apathy is not a courageous way to exist,

**We are the ones who  
make a difference -- by  
each and every choice we  
make.**

**Marie T. Russell**

especially when it is done to protect a person's perishable talents. And yet, it is pervasive among exercise physiologists with the attitude that the sports medicine and exercise science model is the way forward. They should acknowledge the difference between exercise science and exercise physiology. But, unfortunately, the problem is that years of crooked thinking has led the exercise physiology professors, in particular, in the wrong direction. Today, as it was the year that ASEP was founded ~20 years ago, they fail to understand that they are not making the choices necessary for the students of exercise physiology to be successful after college (2). I ask you, "Where is their pride and commitment to the profession of exercise physiology and to the teaching profession?" Where is their willingness to make choices that are right and good for all exercise physiologists?

Let me ask another question, and be honest in answering it. Do you think you can make a difference in exercise physiology? Just because you are one person does not mean others won't listen. Just because you may not have the PhD does not mean that you can't be a leader in changing exercise physiology from a discipline to a profession. You can make a difference in your life and the lives of the students of

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exercise physiology. Yes, I realize you may think the challenge is too great to even try, but your contribution can help. You can make a difference, that is, if you don't lose heart and give up. I know you can make a big difference in ASEP and its influence on society's view of exercise physiologists as healthcare professionals. How? By joining ASEP and sharing your ideas with other members of ASEP as well as with your colleagues, friends, and others.

The truth is you can directly influence other non-ASEP exercise physiologists, and you do not need a PhD to it. Think about it. What you do today as an ASEP member can impact your colleagues by sharing your thoughts about exercise physiology as a healthcare profession. It is amazing what happens when a person starts to believe in possibilities. It empowers them to take their circumstances and turn them into wonderful positives. This means when a friend or colleague says otherwise, your thinking and beliefs are secure and right on because they are founded on what makes a profession different from a discipline. Why is this important? Simply stated, the old ways of doing things don't work anymore, so it is vital that exercise physiologists find new ones.

The ASEP leaders are ready to try the untried. The organization was conceived and configured to find a new equilibrium among exercise physiologists to accelerate the change process. The members' energy and purpose are influenced by the ASEP Goals and Objectives (3). The best way to understand this point is to experience it by becoming a member. Members understand research is important, but it is not enough. If you are a college teacher with the goal to publish more and more research

papers, you must understand that is not enough without a much larger purpose. Deep down in all of us we know it is important to stop ignoring the demands of our students and the work required to put exercise physiology on the high road to success. While each person's journey will be unique, there are also similarities. Discover your own new equilibrium in the ASEP's language of "what is exercise physiology" and compare it to the work of the established professions (4).

Understandably, it is no simple matter to change. However, it is possible to do so. How hard are you willing to work to shape the future of exercise physiology? Be open to possibilities and allow yourself to be courageous. Change can begin today. The truth is this: we will all benefit from your desire to help build the "profession of exercise physiologists". Remember also, "With our faith in God, we can do all things." Or, as written in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Hence, in the end, your faith in God will give you the will to make a choice, and that is what makes the difference.

Also, keep in mind that exercise medicine is booming all over the world. It is an authentic medicine whose true role has been overshadowed by the physician's drugs. The day will come when societies around the world will dial into regular exercise as their means to mind and body medicine. Hopefully, with the continued development of ASEP as "the" society of qualified exercise medicine professionals, there will be little or no dispute over who should be in charge of prescribing exercise medicine. For the moment, it is unclear among the healthcare professions which profession is in charge of administering exercise medicine. Yet, the fundamental flaw in this brief assessment is that professionals know what nurses do and what physical therapists do. When exercise physiologists assume the other professionals know they are "the" exercise medicine professionals, such thinking becomes even more problematic.

It is quite possible of course this point of contention does not necessarily have to be a divide between professionals. The genie in the magic bottle of "making a decision and changing" is, in some respects, is awfully powerful when we come together in accordance with the pre-established steps of professionalism and credibility. To put it briefly, we need ASEP and we need each other to make the right decision that represents the professionalization of exercise physiology coming into reality. The profession of exercise physiology can only be constructed through the participation of a large sampling of exercise physiologists. It is all very simple, really. Perhaps the best way to view this point is to think of more as better when correcting "what is" to "what should be". Let us ask the question, "What can an

**If we don't make the choices that are ours to make, others will make those choices for us. Let's take our power back and create the life we want for ourselves.**

Marie T. Russell (5)

organization of dedicated professionals do as well or better than one person, now or in the future?”

For one thing, it is easier to act when we are part of an organization poised to make a choice of this or that, especially when a large number of individuals come together in agreement to do something. There is hardly anything more powerful than the majority vote. There is an intimate contact between one person and the majority. Hence, it is important to do the right thing for the right reasons. This way we all move in the right direction and explore our world of exercise physiology as being vital to healthcare. The ASEP leaders believe that the ASEP organization of exercise physiologists will help each person explore, share, amplify, and define the collective specifics of their healthcare career opportunities.

There are some interesting things to consider about building and supporting our own professional organization. The most provocative is the implicit assumption that we will define and control our destiny. Yet, strangely, the enormity of this thought has not penetrated the thinking of most exercise physiologists. It is a pity that so many academics, in particular, are so bent on getting ahead in their jobs that they are not looking ahead to make sure their students' time is being spent in a meaningful or meaningless way. The challenge is clear. How do we learn to think about exercise physiology differently than we do now?

For certain, it is clear that if we don't resist the temptation to ride the current of least resistance, we are sure to fail in creating the big picture. Perhaps, the answer lies in Gordon Porter Miller's words (in *Life Choices*), "Awareness of choice begins with the awareness of self and of what you want in life" (6). The bottom line is that if we don't try, we will have no say in our future. Hence, make the choice to make a difference!

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