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**The Professional Organization of Exercise Physiologists**

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**ASEP, Exercise Physiologists, and Exercise Medicine**

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*Leaders don’t force people to follow –they invite them on a journey.*

*-- Charles S. Lauer*

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rganizations are important in the empowerment of their members. In the late 1990s, the American Society of Exercise Physiologists (ASEP) was founded to help with the development of professionalism in exercise physiology. Fortunately, there is only one professional organization of exercise physiologists and that is ASEP. It meets the 21st century needs of exercise physiologists throughout the United States (1).

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| ***To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others.******-- Anthony Robbins*** |

While the ASEP membership is not large compared to other professional organizations, the number of exercise physiologists who understand the value and significance of ASEP is increasing. This very gradual shift in membership from the generic organization to a professional organization indicates the need to better understand the current practice of exercise physiology.

In fact, as an exercise physiologist said to me in a recent email, “Concerns about ethical issues in fitness programs in particular and healthcare in general have increased.” Hence, it is important that graduates from an ASEP accredited exercise physiology degree program understand how great it is their department chair and faculty are committed to an active support of exercise physiology professionalism, work values, ethical issues, standards of practice, and board certification” (2).

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| ***It is time for a new generation of leadership to cope with new problems and new opportunities.******-- John F. Kennedy*** |

The truth is that before 1997 anyone could call him- or herself an exercise physiologist. Today, it isn’t as easy to do so and get away with it and yet it is still being done. It was only during the past 17 years that exercise physiology has become a credentialed profession. Using the words “exercise physiology” and “certification” in one sentence is a first-ever experience for many. But, do not be surprised by the new thinking and values, such as the Exercise Physiologist Certified or EPC. It is more often referred to as the ASEP Board Certification or the ***Board Certified Exercise Physiologist***. The certification indicates that a specialized level of education has been accomplished that is consistent with moral and ethical principles of other healthcare professions.

In exercise physiology, the educational credential obtained from an ASEP accredited academic institution indicates that a minimum level of competency in exercise physiology knowledge and skills has been attained. The academic achievement is defined by a baccalaureate degree in exercise physiology. Then, after the right academic preparation and successful completion of the EPC exam, a college graduate can engage in the practice of exercise physiology as a Board Certified Exercise Physiologist. The additional exercise physiology credentials include the master’s degree and PhD degree in exercise physiology. Although exercise physiology licensure does not exist in the United States (3), it will in time become part of the future of all exercise physiologists.

Right now, however, opportunities have never been better for the recent college graduates. They are healthcare’s front-line professionals in prescribing exercise medicine (4). Men and women of all ages are increasingly coming to the understanding that the medical benefits of exercise are tremendous. Exercise helps almost every chronic disease by prevention and/or treatment.

Now that society has come to understand that medicine does not have to be a pill (5) and that it doesn’t have to be prescribed by a medical doctor, the doors of career opportunities are open for ASEP Board Certified Exercise Physiologists. ***Exercise is medicine and it should be prescribed by Board Certified Exercise Physiologists.*** The central and/or peripheral adaptations that result from regular exercise are effective in the prevention and/or treatment of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes mellitus, hypertension, obesity, arthritis, cancers, and certain mental health disorders (6).

So, why is exercise physiology not the primary “exercise-oriented” degree in colleges and universities throughout the United States? Also, why is it that just about anyone thinks he or she is qualified to “prescribe” exercise? Despite a person’s interest in exercise and fitness, it doesn’t mean that the person is qualified to make choices and decisions about the appropriateness of certain types of exercises. Surprising as it may seem, it is critical that Board Certified Exercise Physiologists are involved in the ethical decision making process. They are academically prepared healthcare professionals.

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| ***Every patient needs an exercise physiologist.******-- Brenda Boone*** |

The most common reason Board Certified Exercise Physiologists should speak up is that the present approach to “exercise is medicine” isn’t working. The majority of the adults do not exercise, and they are becoming increasingly obese. The ASEP exercise physiologists who are EPCs are ready to implement critical thinking pathways to get individuals of all ages up and exercising. They have the academic training and skills to teach their clients and patients the safe way to exercise and do so with an understanding of applied physiology and anatomy (7).

It is up to exercise physiologists to increase the impetus for change with decreasing involvement in strategies that distract from professional development of exercise physiology. We need to start communicating with each other. It is pastime to think about exercise physiologists as college teachers and nothing else. It is also bordering on being unethical in telling our students to apply to physical therapy school because we understand the challenges they will face at graduation. Yes, that can change and our students’ future as entrepreneurs can be their reality. That is why they need to take some business courses while working the undergraduate degree (8).

The ASEP Board Certified Exercise Physiologists should view themselves as equals in their interactions with members of other healthcare professions. After all, they have passed the “Exercise Physiologist Certified” exam and, thus are worthy of being an equal to physicians, dietitians, physical therapists, nurses, and others. Their work is critical to helping to control the escalating costs of healthcare. They are disease-management professionals who are responsible for prescribing exercise medicine for patients with chronic diseases.

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| ***Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.******-- Margaret Mead*** |

Their work is guided by exercise medicine protocols that are based on guidelines that incorporate ASEP approved standards of practice. The standards are specific recommendations that come from a review of the best evidence on specific diseases to promote the health and well-being of patients and clients (4). Acknowledging the scientific evidence also helps to ensure their safety. The ASEP emphasis on professionalism (9) and exercise physiology as a healthcare profession is changing the way that exercise physiologists will think about the exercise physiology academic major (10).

This is important for many reasons, but in particular to help with the healthcare expenditures. For example, Jason Millman said in *The Washington Post* that, “Most of the $2.9 trillion (which is about $9,255 per person) is spent on hospital care ($936.9 billion), physicians and clinical services ($586.7 billion), and prescription drugs ($271.1 billion).” To make matters worse, the “…most recent projections predict that health spending will almost double to $5.2 trillion in 2023, when it will account for 19.3 percent of the economy” (11).  That is just 6 years from now!

With the help of the ASEP Board Certified Exercise Physiologists, the rising costs of healthcare should be less in the foreseeable future. Why? Because they will help the number of older people, who typically use increased healthcare resources, attain better fitness and health through the application of exercise medicine. The increased availability of the “exercise physiologist as the new 21st century healthcare professional” will help cut the competitive edge as well as the heavy cost reliance on clinical and medical technology.

In other words, since the ASEP Board Certified Exercise Physiologists are not part of the traditional increase in the rising labor costs, consumers will be more than willing to engage the exercise physiologist in, for example, a safe and individualized exercise program to help them prevent and/or treat hypertension, obesity, and a host of other chronic diseases and disabilities. The growth and population aging is a huge part of the increase in the rising prices for healthcare services. Also, in addition to the aforementioned considerations, the increase in physician and clinical services is projected to grow the $3.4 trillion spent on healthcare in 2016 to $5.5 trillion by 2025.

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| ***A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.******-- John F. Kennedy*** |

Exercise physiologists are coming to realize that healthcare is not a one-dimensional topic, but a complex struggle across society. Exercise medicine is exercise therapy of which the ASEP Board Certified Exercise Physiologists realize that “exercise physiologists are exercise therapists”. However, to be viewed as a credible healthcare professional, exercise physiologists must share the ASEP interest in linking exercise physiology to professionalism and ASEP membership to build a prominent position and a legitimate power base in the community. This means we must network to build and nurture a solid pool of members whose connections and coalitions will negotiate on behalf of ASEP exercise physiologists.

Needless to say, much work remains to be done. Board Certified Exercise Physiologists and all other ASEP exercise physiologists must continue to strive for professional recognition as exercise medicine professionals and entrepreneurs (12). Their knowledge and technology coupled with the ASEP accreditation and standards of professional practice are positively associated with decreasing the challenges of the workplace, enhancing the quality of care, and helping to control the escalating costs of healthcare.

***Welcome to Exercise Physiology!*** *Join the ASEP family of healthcare professionals in our efforts to unify our academic knowledge, define and develop our laboratory skills, desires, and dreams of creating our vision.*

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