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**Belief in ASEP and Exercise Physiology: A Healthcare Profession**

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*In the words of Henry Ford, “Whether you believe you can, or you can't, you are right.”*

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| If you believe you can, you probably can. If you believe you won't, you most assuredly won't. Belief is the ignition switch that gets you off the launching pad.  -- Denis Waitley |

he Free Dictionary by Farlex (1) defines exercise physiology as a “Body of knowledge concerns physiologic, metabolic, and structural responses to short-term and long-term physical activity.” Is the definition correct? Also, in what way does the definition take away from exercise physiologists? There are other questions and concerns as well. For example, another rather common definition of exercise physiology is “…the [physiology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Physiology) of [physical exercise](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Physical_exercise)” that is often followed by “…the acute responses and chronic adaptations to a wide range of exercise conditions” (2). Are these definitions useful? Also, is it helpful to a recent college graduate with an exercise physiology major to read on the Wikipedia website (2) that “The basis of Exercise Physiology as a major is to prepare students for a career in field of health sciences”?

There isn’t any question that these definitions are wrong. How do I know that is the case? Very simply by looking at the definition of exercise physiology on the American Society of Exercise Physiologists (ASEP) website (3), which says that exercise physiology is “The comprehensive delivery of treatment services concerned with the analysis, improvement, and maintenance of the physiological mechanisms underlying physical and mental health and fitness through regular exercise, the prevention and/or treatment of chronic diseases and/or disabilities with exercise medicine, and the professional guidance of athletes and others interested in athletics and sports training.”

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| Man is made by his beliefs. As he believes, so he is.  -- The Bhagavad Gita |

Yet, given the ASEP definition, Thomas Smith (4) said on the Quora website that “Exercise physiology is the study of how the body reacts and changes in response to exercise not only physical but cognitive and social aspects as well.” You can see that the definition by Smith is obviously wrong! Similarly, but the definition that takes the ugly cake appears on the American Kinesiology Association (AKA) website (5). Apparently it is written by Dr. Paul Davis, Associate Professor of Kinesiology at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC. He says that “Exercise physiology is a sub-discipline of kinesiology that addresses: (a) the short-term biological responses to the stress of physical activity; and (b) how the body adapts to repeated bouts of physical activity over time.” Not only is the statement wrong, it is misleading and highly biased rhetoric. Note that in the “Highly Regarded List of Exercise Physiology-Related Organizations” at the bottom of the AKA page, the American Society of Exercise Physiologists is not listed. Why is that the case? There is only one professional organization of exercise physiologists and that is ASEP.

Although the Study.com website correctly identifies ASEP as being responsible for the academic accreditation of exercise physiology degree programs (6), the definition of exercise physiology is wrong. For example, the site says that “Exercise physiology is the study of the mechanics of body movements and how physical exertion affects the human body.”  Here again, Chris Schwirian (7), Instructor of Physiology at Ohio University makes the same mistake. He says that “Exercise physiology is a scientific discipline that focuses on how an organism responds to exercise.” Once again, here is the correct definition from the ASEP website. Exercise physiology is the “…comprehensive delivery of treatment services concerned with the analysis, improvement, and maintenance of the physiological mechanisms underlying physical and mental health and fitness through regular exercise, the prevention and/or treatment of chronic diseases and/or disabilities with exercise medicine, and the professional guidance of athletes and others interested in athletics and sports training.”

So, what is the problem? The fact that the definition of exercise physiology is wrong time after time sets the stage for confusion and misleading thoughts and ideas as to what is an exercise physiologist. The same problem does not exist with the physical therapist or other healthcare professionals. Note what the website wiseGEEK (8) says, “Exercise physiology is a field of study devoted to examining the body’s response to physical activity.” The 2015 Physiology of Exercise Laboratory course syllabus at The University Texas at Tyler is essentially the same definition. Dr. Michael Wiggs (9) defines exercise physiology as “…the study of how the body functions in response to exercise.”

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| If you don’t change your beliefs, your life will be like this forever. Is that good news?  -- William Somerset Maugham |

No doubt the primary reason why there are so many different definitions is because exercise physiology is an “emerging profession”. The historical context of exercise physiology goes back to the traditional health and physical education degree. Students were required, as I was in the mid-1960s, to take the “physiology of exercise” course. It is still a required course in the HPE degree as it is in the exercise physiology degree. But, it isn’t the only science-oriented academic course in the exercise physiology degree. Students take at least 7 of the following 9 courses: functional anatomy (kinesiology), electrocardiography, fitness assessment and exercise prescription, exercise metabolism, cardiac rehabilitation, nutrition, biomechanics, research design, and/or exercise and special populations (10).

Exercise physiology is a healthcare profession that will continue to evolve for years to come. After all, in regards to ASEP and its efforts to promote a positive image of exercise physiology, both ASEP (as the professional organization of exercise physiologists) and exercise physiology (as a healthcare profession) are just 20 years old. That is, none of the characteristics of a profession (e.g., in particular, code of ethics, board certification, academic accreditation, and standards of professional practice) existed before being written by ASEP leaders (11). The idea that exercise science is exercise physiology is inaccurate, as is true with sports sciences, sports fitness, kinesiology, human movement, and similar degree programs. Strangely enough, while little is noted of this by academic exercise physiologists, it is nonetheless true (12).

It is also true that aside from the work of ASEP to build a professional infrastructure to support the 21st view of exercise physiology, it is amazing how much work remains to be done with how exercise physiologists think of themselves. An interesting parallel is when I was coaching men’s gymnastics at Northeast Louisiana State University in Monroe, La in 1968-69. Even though I knew a gymnast was physically ready to perform a higher level gymnastic skill, it was always difficult to get him to try if he didn’t believe he could do it. The power of the mind is huge in all walks of life. It doesn’t matter whether it is sports or believing that it is possible to describe and embrace exercise physiology as a healthcare profession. If exercise physiologists are uncomfortable with ASEP’s decision to grow exercise physiology as a dynamic profession, then it will be next to impossible to be accepted as healthcare professionals on the same level as physical therapists or athletic trainers.

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| The future is today….There is no tomorrow.  -- Dale Carnegie |

Does this mean ASEP is a loss cause? No, just because there dozens of different definitions of exercise physiology, it doesn’t mean the right definition is wrong or useless. What it does mean is that everyone who has the mindset that embraces the wrong definitions will not rise to the level of an exercise physiologist just as the gymnast who refuses to try a gymnastic move will be struck at that level of performance. To advance and to grow in sports, life, and work, a person must believe that it is possible to be what you want to be. By belief, I mean that we choose to believe in an idea, such as it is possible for the students of exercise physiology to be as successful after college as are the students of physical therapy.

As Jordan Phonex (13) said, “…our beliefs are things that WE DECIDE WE WANT TO THINK are true, based on the information we have taken in up until this point in our lives.” The ASEP members have decided to believe that exercise physiology is a healthcare profession deserving more than failed rhetoric and misinformation, and the unwillingness of many to think beyond status quo. They are in agreement with the ASEP view of exercise physiology by consciously accepting the ASEP created reality that serves both the health and well-being of its membership and society. It is as Mark 11:24 (NIV) says, "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (14).

Regardless of the size of ASEP or the failure of the academic exercise physiology community to speak up and support ASEP as the professional organization of exercise physiologists, we (who are members of ASEP) believe that we are healthcare professionals today not tomorrow. Moreover, we believe that we are the key professionals responsible for prescribing exercise medicine to prevent and/or treat chronic diseases and disabilities in clients and patients of all ages and gender (15). As Tania Kotsos (16) said, “You will know that you truly believe…when you no longer feel a sense of desperate desire. Instead, you will feel a sense of knowing and peace of mind that comes with the power of belief.” Believe in yourself and those you care about means everything. There is nothing ordinary about the ASEP organization. It is here today, and it is the professional organization of exercise physiologists.

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| Your time is limited, so don’t waste it living someone else’s life. Don’t be trapped by dogma, which is living with the results of other people’s thinking. Don’t let the noise of other’s opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.  -- Steve Jobs |

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