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Observational Studies

A Qualitative Examination of Professional Role Commitment Among Athletic Trainers Working in the Secondary School Setting

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Abstract

Context: Work-related demands can challenge an athletic trainer's professional role commitment for an extended period throughout one's career.

Objective: To explore how athletic trainers perceive the phenomenon of professional commitment and maintain this commitment while working in a professionally challenging environment.

Design: Basic, interpretive qualitative study.

Setting: Secondary school.

Patients or Other Participants: A criterion sample was used. Each participant had a minimum of 10 years of experience as an athletic trainer and self-identified as having maintained his or her professional commitment. Seventeen individuals (14 men, 3 women) with a mean age of 44.3 ± 6.8 years and 19.0 ± 6.7 years of experience in the secondary school setting participated in the study.

Data Collection and Analysis: Seventeen total interviews were conducted. Interviews were transcribed and an inductive analysis was performed. A peer debriefing and member checks with 7 participants were completed to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings.

Results: Four themes emerged from the findings: 1) professional responsibility, 2) rewards, 3) respect, and 4) rejuvenation. Participants explained that a strong sense of responsibility to their patients was a prominent feature of maintaining their commitment. Their professional commitment was influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards and respect from others. The last emergent theme, rejuvenation, explained the necessity of having appropriate time away from the athletic training role to interact with peers and address personal needs.

Conclusions: A strong sense of professional responsibility to both patients and the athletic training discipline is a central feature of professional commitment. Organizations, such as high school athletic programs, can play an influential role

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in helping an athletic trainer to maintain professional commitment by examining the intrinsic and extrinsic reward systems, assessing the work structure to ensure time to address personal needs, fostering effective communication, and addressing continuing education needs to maintain competence.

Keywords: [organizational commitment](#), [organizational socialization](#), [professional responsibility](#)

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