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Use of Coming Out Star Activity to Improve Cultural Competence in Undergraduate Athletic Training Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this case study is to describe the use of an activity to give athletic training students insights into the challenges faced by the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual (LGBTIA) population. The students were instructed to pick a colored star and write their name in the middle of it. Students then wrote the name of a close friend, a family member, a community they were involved with, a job they wanted, and their life goals on the points of their star. Once they had finished writing on their star, their mentor informed them that the scenarios he would be reading to them would be

explaining what would happen to the points on their star if they were a member of the LGBTQIA population and came out to those parties. Each star carried different consequences for each scenario, leading to various end results. Upon completing the scenarios, the mentor then led the students through a discussion on the importance of cultural competence as athletic trainers. This activity provided a framework for reinforcing the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education that requires cultural competency be included in curriculum.

Keywords: Cultural Competence, Diversity, Patient Centered Care

Introduction

Previous research has suggested that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA) athletic trainers and student-athletes encounter difficulties in their work or competition settings given their status as minorities. ^[1-4] To date, there has been little research conducted to investigate the challenges and concerns of LGBTQIA athletic trainers, athletics staff members, and student-athletes. Previous research that has been conducted has found that athletic trainers generally have a positive opinion of individuals who identify as LGBTQIA. ^[3] However, these athletic trainers did not appear to be knowledgeable of all the challenges specific to healthcare for an LGBTQIA person. ^[3]

In the most recent standards produced by the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE) instruct athletic training education programs to ensure their curriculum features coursework designed to enhance cultural competence. ⁵ Although this directive is clearly written, how a program goes about including this standard is largely left up to the program's discretion. Thus, the aim of this case study is to describe a training activity done during beginning of the school year orientation for undergraduate athletic training students designed to improve cultural competency when caring for LGBTQIA patients.

Athletic training student characteristics

The activity was performed with 12 undergraduate athletic training students enrolled in a Texas Athletic Training Licensure Program.

Mentor characteristics

The mentor practiced at a NCAA Division II university in a large rural city. The mentor has been an athletic trainer for 12 years and has been a preceptor/mentor for 9 of those 12 years. The mentor had completed his Doctorate of Education in

Kinesiology, and his Masters' of Education in Athletic Training. He has also served as a subject matter expert for a CAATE accredited athletic training program undergoing its transition from a bachelors' program to a masters' program. There are seven other athletic trainers who interact with the athletic training students on a semi-regular basis.

Experience

Prior to the start of pre-season practices for sports teams competing in the Fall semester, athletic training students underwent an orientation to familiarize them with programmatic policies and procedures. The students also completed two short games to get to know the other members of their cohort. For their last activity during orientation, students were told they would be taking part in the Coming Out Star Activity. They were not provided much information about the activity before starting, other than that the activity was intended to provide insights into the experiences different people go through when coming out.

The first step in the activity was for students to each choose a blue, orange, red, or purple star. Students were given no other prompts, other than to pick a star. Once each student had picked a star, they were informed that the star was a representation of their world. The center of the star represented the student, so they put their name in the middle of the star. Next, the students chose a point on the star, and wrote the name of a close friend who they confided in. Students then chose another point on the star and wrote down a community that they were part of such as a church or club. On the third point of the star, the students wrote the name of a family member who they could trust to make them happy when they were sad. On the fourth point, students wrote down a job they wanted. On last point, the students wrote down any hopes or dreams they had.

Once students had completed writing on their star, the mentor began to read through a series of scenarios. Students were informed that they were going to be taken through these scenarios as if they were a member of the LGBTQIA community that had made the decision to come out to those around them. Each scenario impacted one of the parties represented by a point of the star. If the news was met with positive emotions and feedback, the student left the point upright. If the news was met with hesitance and questions the point was folded back. This represented that that party was not gone from the student's life, but would take time to rebuild their relationship. If the news was met negatively or harshly, the point was torn off as it was no longer part of the student's life.

In general, students who selected a blue star were met with positive feedback and enthusiasm. Students with the blue star did not lose any of the parts of their star, and as such maintained all the aspects of their life as it had been before coming out. Students with a purple star were met with more positive than negative feedback, but still had to re-establish relationships with their family member and work environment. Students with an orange star were met with more negative than positive feedback, but still had enough relationships they would be able to re-establish in order to still achieve their life goals. Students with a red star were met with completely negative feedback, and were informed that because of this trauma they were at risk of falling into despair and becoming part of the LGBTQIA community that abuses drug or alcohol and has suicidal ideations.

After the outcomes of their scenarios were read to them, students were asked to share their thoughts and feelings. To get the conversation started, the mentor shared that when he first completed the activity as part of a workshop he experience emotional distress. This distress was due to the thought of someone's pursuit of happiness and fulfillment potentially leading to such a tragic result. Once the mentor shared his thoughts and feelings, some of the students shared stories of friends and family members who had been met with mixed reactions when coming out. After students had the chance to share, the mentor concluded the activity by encouraging the students to remember how this activity made them feel if they ever had a LGBTQIA patient who confided in them. The mentor explained to them that as healthcare providers, it was imperative that athletic trainers provided patient centered care. Namely, athletic trainers need to consider the individual beliefs, values, and challenges their patients might be encountering.

Results and discussion

The overall results of the activity were positive. Some students stated that coming into the activity without much advanced information allowed them to be openminded. As such, the implementation of this activity appeared to work best when students were given minimal information about the activity prior to beginning. The discussion after the activity was equally important and worked well when it was student driven. The mentor attempted to deliver simple prompts but made a point of not calling on any students who did not volunteer opinions of information. By concluding with commentary on patient centered care, the mentor was able to provide the students with insights into the clinical relevance of the activity.

Clinical bottom line

Cultural competence is a crucial component of athletic trainers being able to provide patient centered care. In fact, cultural competence is such an important component for healthcare that it is recognized as a factor by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.^[6] Given the unique challenges encountered by LGBTQIA patients, gaining a better understanding of the issues facing these patients is critical to optimal patient centered care.^[3] The ultimate goal of this activity was to try to give athletic training students more insight into the issues LGBTQIA patients face. By giving minimal information at the beginning of the activity, students were more likely to fill out their star truthfully. This had the potential to make the scenarios being read to them more meaningful. Future research should be conducted to determine the impact of the Coming Out Star Activity on enhancing cultural competence among athletic training students.

Student perspective

Athletic training students have stated, "I was surprised by how much I was affected by this activity. By not knowing what the whole activity involved before filling out my star, I feel like I was less guarded with what I wrote. This made it more meaningful for me as the scenarios were read." Additionally, "I plan on using this activity with the student organizations I am a member of. I think it would be helpful for people in all areas to get a better understanding of what other people might be facing."

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