

Pilot Interview of a Magnet Program in Sports Medicine

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Objective: The objective of this investigation was to identify characteristics and perceived effectiveness of a sports medicine magnet program and determine the effectiveness of our research tool in gaining information about magnet programs. **Design and Setting:** Our investigation utilized a pilot semi-structured interview to analyze the effectiveness of one magnet program for Sports Medicine specializations. We utilized purposive sampling for this investigation, a magnet program in the South Florida area; however, we intend to expand our sampling population in future investigations to include magnet programs across the nation to increase the external validity of our findings. **Subjects:** One magnet program coordinator was interviewed regarding program operation and efficacy. The coordinator provided insight into the operations and regulations of the program. **Measurements:** The interview was tape-recorded and the data transcribed. Key phrases were analyzed and compared to current research regarding various magnet programs. **Results:** Student interest in pursuing the allied health professions with a focus on the athletic population has increased over the years. The program coordinator reported that almost 60% of current students were interested in pursuing health careers, an increase of approximately 20% from the previous year. The program coordinator believed student perception of efficacy was high; however, no structured evaluation had been conducted. **Conclusion:** As a result of the local magnet program, student understanding of and interest in athletic training as a career increased. Our pilot investigation revealed a need for further research and the use of a more structured interview to gain insight into the development and implementation of magnet programs. **Key Words:** athletic training, mentorship, specialization

Although athletic training is gaining recognition among allied health professions, the general population is less familiar with this facet of sports medicine. Few students are pursuing allied health professions, and even fewer are entering the field of athletic training due to a lack of knowledge⁵ of the general public and often their misperceptions about allied health professions.³ Researchers suggest parent perceptions revere physicians and physical therapist among the more “prestigious” professions,² while other allied health professions rank lower. Magnet programs have been utilized to increase public knowledge, improve perceptions, and remove the common misnomers associated with the profession of athletic training.

A magnet program is a comprehensive program offering multiple classes concentrating on various aspects of a desired specialization.¹ For example, science magnet programs expose students who excel in the sciences to various science-based or health professions.^{2,5} Science programs have demonstrated that students exposed to concepts within allied health show aspirations of entering the medical profession, even when the curriculum does not emphasize one profession over another.⁴ Magnet programs usually include a sequence of elective and non-elective classes tailored toward an area of specialization throughout high school.¹ Today, many health related magnet programs involve mentorship and allow for specialization (focused learning).⁵ Mentorship provides professional role models for students to observe and seek professional guidance. Specialization tailors student learning toward a specific field or category

of career options. The combination of these two characteristics makes magnet programs of interest to the profession of athletic training.

In the collegiate setting, students studying athletic training are able to obtain knowledge through coursework and advanced skills through assigned clinical residencies and mentorship by approved clinical instructors. In the high school, students may learn basic skills and obtain knowledge pertaining to athletic training or sports medicine but may not have the opportunity to apply this knowledge or observe its operation in the clinical setting. The incorporation of mentorship and specialization in the high school would mimic that of the collegiate setting and more importantly allow students more experiential learning opportunities than cannot be taught in the classroom alone. In the high school environment, clinical experiences correspond to mentorship and affiliations in which students observe and assist various health care professionals. Although not allowed to assist in evaluations or treatment of patients, students will be encouraged to critically think, problem solve, and stimulate discussion. As a result of these interactions not exclusive to athletic training, students may have a better understanding of the uniqueness of the profession and become more aware of various health career options.

We sought to identify the benefits of a magnet program for high school students progressing into the profession of athletic training. We utilized a semi-structured interview to gather information regarding magnet program funding, curriculum development and program requirements from one magnet program coordinator. As this is a pilot study, we interviewed one program coordinator to test our research tool and strengthen our interviewing skills.

Methods

Our investigation utilized a semi-structured interview to analyze the effectiveness of magnet programs for Athletic Training or Sports Medicine specializations. A pilot interview is a practice interview which allows the investigator to practice interview questions and gain feedback on the interview method and questions themselves. To our knowledge, there exists only one magnet program in the South Florida area; therefore, we used purposive sampling for this investigation. We interviewed the program coordinator at an urban secondary school in South Florida and sought to gather her perceptions about the effectiveness of the program and to gain in-depth information about the development of the curriculum and implementation of experiential hours (Table 1).

Results

Our pilot interview revealed important information about the Health and Wellness Magnet Program at this urban secondary school. We asked the program coordinator to tell us about the development and implementation of this program. She informed us that although the school itself is not a magnet school, administration implemented the Health and Wellness Magnet Program which constitutes approximately 5% of the school population. Interested students complete the magnet program application and if they satisfy several eligibility requirements the students are admitted into the program. If there are more applicants than available seats, a lottery system is utilized for selection purposes. Students take classes within the school to satisfy graduation requirements along with specified core classes for their area of specialization within the magnet program. To fulfill graduation requirements of the program, students must complete 20 hr of community service in the athletic training room and 20 hr at an additional facility. The program coordinator labeled this structure as a “school within a school” as students are in separate classes from the rest of the student population with the exception of core courses necessary for graduation.

The Health and Wellness program is financially independent from the school as funding is received by the government for edifying program development and enhancing student learning experiences. The program coordinator reported that financial freedom allows her leeway in deciding what activities students should be involved in (field trips, equipment purchases, etc.). In addition to financial freedom, the program coordinator is not guided by any state mandates at this time for curriculum development. As such, the coordinator and other faculty gathered input and developed broad subject matter by exploring various aspects of different health professions. The program's autonomy has positively influenced its success and development, as faculty members were able to mold the program into various areas of specialization for interested students. In the early stages of development, courses offered evolved from psychology and other general subject matter, to more concentrated courses such as nutrition, kinesiology and sport specific weight training. Available courses were modeled after college courses in the health sciences at a local university. The material was simplified for secondary school students; however, students had the opportunity to take advanced placement courses for college credit in similar areas of study. The program prides itself on its dual enrollment option in which students attend both high school and college classes, thereby obtaining college credit while still completing their high school requirements. The program coordinator reported that she and other faculty provide assistance to the students in searching for colleges and scholarships as they near the end of their enrollment. In addition, the program provides class field trips and requires students to volunteer at local agencies for community service hours to gather knowledge about various allied health professions.

Our pilot investigation revealed the perceived effectiveness of the program as reported by the coordinator. Initially the graduates of the program were not as interested in pursuing a field in the health professions but over the years, student interest in allied health professions increased. Almost 60% of current students are interested in pursuing health careers as opposed to 40% last year and even fewer in years past. Many students were interested in pursuing a field related to sports medicine but were not sure which avenue they would follow. The program coordinator reported that students returned and stated that the program has helped them prepare for college by providing coursework that provided insight into future college courses. Students gained work experience as supervisors in the strength and conditioning room and through assisting the athletic trainer in clinics overseeing rehabilitation exercises for injured athletes. Students provided feedback about their enrollment in the program by returning to the school; however, there was no official program evaluation implemented within this program.

Discussion

A magnet school program is one in which the entire school has a curricular specialty.⁶ A specialization provides students with opportunities to explore various aspects of the health sciences although this is not the focus of the school as a whole. A health science magnet program provides students with the visions of their future in college health science education programs and places them ahead of their peers in preparing for college. The local magnet program observed in this pilot study modeled their courses after college courses in the health sciences at a local university. Because students have the opportunity to take advanced placement (AP) courses, any college credit received can be credited toward college graduation requirements, allowing them opportunity for future electives to explore more options in college. Also, the dual enrollment aspect of this particular program was beneficial for the college application process.

Many health profession-inspired magnet programs involve mentorship which has been identified as a key component of informing and educating high school students about their career options.^{3,5} Mentors in the health profession serve as a support system by providing insight, guidance and expertise on career options.^{3,5} Affiliation mentors are available in the athletic training room, neighboring hospitals, rehabilitation clinics, athletic arenas or other athletic organizations and may play an important role in the development and maintenance of athletic training magnet programs.³⁻⁵

For years, many high school initiative programs have utilized collaborative efforts with mentors from local agencies and have reported success.³ Mentors may also volunteer to be guest speakers in classes or allow students to observe them at clinical sites. At the high school observed, the most prominent mentor was the head athletic trainer, one of the founding members of the magnet program and also instructor of several program courses. Although students may superficially recognize allied health professions, their knowledge of these careers is rather limited. The head athletic trainer may help to improve student understanding of sports medicine and clarify common misconceptions. Research has demonstrated that mentorship strongly influences students' perceptions of a profession and their decision to pursue that profession.³

Program affiliations and mentorship initiatives serve to ensure quality educational and clinical experiences for students as they learn basic or remedial skills and information in sports medicine and first aid through lectures and clinical experiences. The local program integrated CPR certification into their curriculum, which benefits not only the students but also their clinical affiliation. The combination of theoretical and experiential learning at the local magnet program provides students with basic skills in the classroom and allows for the evaluation and discussion of these skills in a practical setting. This incorporation of experiential learning allows students to observe health care professionals and gain advanced knowledge and recognition of skills. Students not only have a clinical advantage upon entering college compared to their counterparts but also educational advantages.

We were able to gather information from the program coordinator through simple conversation with the interjection of direct questions throughout the interview. We believe a structured interview would be more beneficial for future data analysis. As a result of this pilot study, we found that the research tool requires more guided questions, as well as additional follow-up questions. We intend to integrate triangulation, or gathering information from students within the magnet program, as well as faculty to obtain a more complete picture of the effectiveness of this program. Valuable information was obtained from the interview. In the future, additional interview questions will be developed to gather further information.

Conclusion

Magnet programs are beneficial to the athletic training profession because they provide exposure of the profession to a captive audience.⁵ In these magnet programs, interested high school students are educated about allied health professions.³ Students become exposed to various health professions and mentorship by active professionals.³⁻⁵ Students from these programs who pursue degrees in an allied health profession may attribute their career decision to the magnet program.

Students enrolled in magnet programs gain exposure to demanding courses and the utilization of problem-based learning could potentially improve standardized test scores.⁶ In addition, these students may become eligible for scholarships as they have built a strong academic and extra-curricular portfolio throughout their enrollment in the program.³ The portfolio not only provides students with a sense of accomplishment but also increases their

competitive edge in the college application process. Further research is necessary to explore magnet or specialization programs across the country to promote the profession of athletic training and other allied health professions. The effectiveness of many programs should be evaluated to observe if there is a connection or to suggest changes to improve programs.

Table 1. Sample Interview Questions

Sample Questions	
Question	What motivated you to create a magnet program?
Follow-up	What guidelines did you use for program implementation? Are there state guidelines for developing curriculum?
Question	How have you tried to improve the program over the years?
Follow-up	Was student feedback a key component to program improvement? How did you obtain student feedback?
Question	Do students in the program assist in the athletic training room?
Follow-up	Does the program have other clinical site affiliations outside of the high school? Are there requirements for professional certifications (i.e. CPR, First Aid)?

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