PLANNING ALCOHOL EDUCATION **PROGRAMS FOR** INTERCOLLEGIATE STUDENT-**ATHLETES**

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ABSTRACT

Issues and concerns in planning and implementing alcohol education programs for student-athletes are outlined. Factors that may contribute to alcohol abuse by student-athletes are discussed, and structural and implementation problems with existing alcohol education programs are addressed. Finally, a six-part comprehensive alcohol education program is presented which includes the following components: education, enhancement, support, counseling, follow-up, and evaluation.

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During the last decade, academic advisors for student-athletes have seen their roles expand to include counseling and career development functions (Mand & Fletcher, 1986). With the advent of the NCAA's alcohol and drug education efforts, it is likely that many athletic counselors will also be asked to organize and implement alcohol education programs. The purpose of this article is to provide athletic counselors with an introduction to alcohol education. Specifically, three general questions will be discussed: Why are student-athletes at risk for alcohol problems? Why have some alcohol education programs failed? What are the components of successful alcohol education efforts?

WHY STUDENT-ATHLETES ARE AT RISK FOR **ALCOHOL PROBLEMS**

In general, drinking has become an integral part of the developmental process of adolescence (Jessor & Jessor, 1977). The independence inherent in the college experience, coupled with the availability of alcohol, places college students at risk for developing alcohol-related problems. For example, the rate of binge drinking, defined as five or more drinks during some occasion in the past month, has been reported at 52% for males aged 18-24 (Centers for Disease Control, 1983).

Although there has been some debate over whether student-athletes use more alcohol than their non-athletic student counterparts, recent investigations suggest that alcohol is the drug of choice for intercollegiate student-athletes and is used at a significantly higher rate than that of the general college student population (Nattiv & Puffer, 1991). Some studies have shown that as many as 91% of college student-athletes and 90% of non-athletes use alcohol (Toohey, 1978; Toohey & Corder, 1981) and approximately 20% have either misused or abused alcohol (Murphy et al., 1985).

It is likely that the factors motivating the drinking behavior in the general population as well as factors specific to the athletic experience contribute to student-athletes' alcohol problems. Nine of these factors are discussed below.

Identity Foreclosure

The quest for athletic excellence typically requires intense attention to be focused on sports goals. Student-athletes invest an enormous amount of time and energy in sport, often at the expense of academic, career, and social pursuits (Remer, Tongate, & Watson, 1978). The need to give "110%" is often demanded by coaches and internalized by student-athletes. While this focus may facilitate athletic excellence, it often leaves student-athletes with little time or energy to engage in the developmental tasks necessary to establish a personal identity (Petitpas & Champagne, 1988).

An important developmental task of college students is exploration and experimentation with different roles and behaviors (Marcia, 1966; Super, 1963). Through the process of exploratory behavior, individuals learn about themselves and develop a wider range of coping resources. Unfortunately, the athletic experience may inhibit opportunities for exploratory behavior and promote a premature commitment to athletics (Heyman, 1987; Nelson, 1983; Petitpas, 1981).

The process of making ideological and occupational commitments without exploratory behavior has been labeled "identity foreclosure" (Marcia. 1966). Foreclosed individuals exhibit considerable anxiety in the face of threats to their careers or challenges to their beliefs. For student-athletes, the selection process, injury, and other types of forced retirement are continual threats (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). With a limited number of coping resources, some student-athletes apparently may turn to alcohol to cope with their unplanned disengagement from sport (Ogilvie & Howe, 1986).

Pressure

Sport competition is a public activity observed by teammates, coaches, fans, friends, and in some cases the media. Student-athletes are under constant public and personal pressure to win (Heyman, 1990). If they perform well, student-athletes are expected to "keep up the good work"; if they perform poorly, they are challenged to improve, to "do it next time." The desire to reach peak performance capacity in athletics is great (McGuire, 1990). When the pressure becomes too great, some student-athletes use alcohol to escape (Heyman, 1990; Ogilvie, 1981).

Alcohol in the Sport Culture

Alcohol is inextricably linked to sport: beer and football, champagne in the locker room, beer commercials during the game, and "let's go out for a few" afterwards. The message to student-athletes is clear: it's "sporting" to drink, and really sporting to drink a lot (Heyman, 1990). Some student-athletes look to role models in the sporting world to see how they manage alcohol use. In general, highly visible athletes publicly support alcohol use. Indeed, a Special Report (1982) indicated that 90% of the major light beer spokesmen were athletes. Student-athletes are often under great pressure to drink, particularly those who want to "fit in." The links between sport ("cool") and alcohol are so strong that student-athletes may have to come up with excuses for NOT drinking.

Social Lubricant

Student-athletes often appear to have a lot of self-confidence. Unfortunately, this confidence may be sport-specific; that is, off the playing field, student-athletes may feel socially inept (Remer et al., 1978). They want to present the outward appearance of social confidence, but inwardly they may question their ability to "look good" in social situations. Alcohol is often used to reduce fears or social awkwardness.

Isolation from Family and Other Social Supports

For many student-athletes, going off to college is their first experience living away from home. Typically, they are quickly absorbed into campus life, and their teammates become their primary source of social support (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). Unfortunately, teammates are not good sources of emotional support (Rosenfeld, Richman, & Hardy, 1989). Teammates are often friendly

and social but frequently hesitate to share their emotional concerns with those who are competing with them for positions or status on the team.

Problems associated with the lack of emotional support can be compounded for student-athletes who are isolated from family and other home-based sources of support and who may not have learned how to initiate new sources of social support beyond their teammates. Lack of social support (low density of support network, low social contact, lack of closeness of support network members, and low levels of companionship) has been observed in the athletic experience (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990) and has been found to be associated with the quantity and frequency of drinking behavior (Fondacaro & Heller, 1983).

In addition, many student-athletes view seeking help as a sign of weakness and try to cope with problems and pressures on their own. When left to their own limited coping resources, some student-athletes find alcohol a convenient escape mechanism.

It Won't Happen to Me

To measure up in athletic competition, student-athletes have to excel under pressure. Student-athletes may be able to perform in part because of the "delusion of invulnerability" (McGuire, 1990) that allows them to believe that bad things won't happen to them. Risk taking and thrill seeking that are so important on the playing field can be dangerous once off the field. Student-athletes may feel that they are invulnerable to harm and addiction, but all are not so lucky (McGuire, 1990).

Athletic Transitions

Beyond the normative events that all college students must face, student-athletes must also cope with the threat of injury, managing pain, surviving the selection process, and adjusting to being a "small fish in a big pond." In addition, "non-events" such as not making the travel squad or not starting can also cause considerable stress (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, in press). Using alcohol can allow student-athletes to repress or temporarily forget their concerns.

It Feels Good

Some student-athletes use alcohol because of the specific physiological effects it has on them. Simply put, drinking can feel good. Alcohol reduces pain and relaxes the body by slowing the activity of the sympathetic nervous system (Myers, 1992). In low doses, alcohol reduces self-awareness and thus self-doubts over shortcomings and failures (Hull & Bond, 1986; Hull, Young, & Jouriles, 1986). Alcohol also decreases control over inhibitions, allowing people to establish "pseudointimacy," the friendliness and assertiveness that lead to closeness when using alcohol (Heyman, 1990). In large doses, alcohol

slows reactions, slurs speech, hinders skilled performances, and disrupts memory processing. Although student-athletes may begin using alcohol for the specific medicative properties, the negative results of alcohol use may also occur (Heyman, 1990).

Face Saving

Using alcohol can become for some student-athletes an excuse for poor play and help them "save face." When performing poorly, a student-athlete may say, "Imagine what I would have done if I hadn't been drinking." A student-athlete may also say, "It was the booze that got me kicked off the team, not my lack of ability."

For some student-athletes, it may be better to be the "best drinker" if they cannot be the best athlete. Whatever the case, alcohol can provide a convenient excuse to ease the pain of not playing or of not playing well, while protecting the student-athletes' sport identity.

PROBLEMS WITH ALCOHOL EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR STUDENT-ATHLETES

Drinking behavior in late adolescence is strongly linked with three motivational factors: habit (e.g., Friday afternoon "happy hour"), drinking to facilitate social contact (e.g., to reduce shyness), and drinking for personal effects (e.g., to reduce stress) (Kwakman, Zuiker, Schippers, & deWuffel, 1988). As outlined above, intercollegiate student-athletes may have experiences that facilitate regular drinking, drinking for social contact, and drinking for relief of stress and negative affect (Johnston & O'Malley, 1986).

It is evident that something needs to be done about alcohol abuse by collegiate student-athletes, but how can institutions help student-athletes avoid, reduce, or eliminate alcohol-related problems? To date, most interventions have relied on brief, one-time educational programs in an attempt to address the problem. However, it is important to note that in general these educational efforts have met with little success (Tricker, Cook & McGuire, 1989). In order to plan comprehensive alcohol education programs, it may be helpful to examine some of the problems associated with existing programs.

Structural and Implementation Problems

As mentioned above, most of the previous attempts at alcohol education have relied exclusively on one-time lecture-based formats. These programs have been effective in increasing knowledge about alcohol and other drugs but have not made any significant change in drinking attitudes or behaviors (Damn, 1991). After all, it is unrealistic to expect that attitudes and behaviors that have been acquired over years can be changed by a two- to four-hour lecture.

Many of these one-time lectures are given by former professional athletes who are recovering alcoholics. Although bringing in a famous athlete will typically insure a large audience, many of these speakers inadvertently send a mixed message. The audience is often more fascinated by the speakers' stories of their athletic feats than they are about hearing of the potential pitfalls of alcohol abuse. The audience observes the speakers dressed in expensive clothing, driving a new car, and surrounded by adoring supporters. The audience hears about the dangers of alcohol abuse but sees little that indicates any real costs of alcohol abuse.

Many of the lecture formats do not provide information relevant to the specific population or situation. It is difficult for the typical college student-athlete to relate to a former professional athlete's self-disclosure about the many temptations of life on the road or to a drug enforcement officer talking about the life of a "born loser." Lectures are more effective when they identify specific situations that student-athletes are apt to face at their particular schools (Tricker et al., 1989), e.g., some of the specific pressures and time demands facing this specific group of student-athletes at this specific school.

Most of these lecture presentations have no follow-up or long-term evaluation system. A college coach would not expect to get much change in offense by giving a two-hour lecture and not having any additional practice or evaluations of skill acquisition, yet many alcohol education programs expect behavior change without follow-up. In terms of program evaluation, it may be more important to determine if a lecture on alcohol use and abuse changed drinking behaviors or increased knowledge of how to refer a teammate for help, rather than how much the participants liked the speaker.

Many alcohol education programs are enacted without the full support or input of coaches, athletic administrators, or student-athletes. These programs are offered as "band-aids" or "for show" and do not have political or financial support, are not afforded sufficient time or personnel resources, and are not clearly understood (Tricker et al., 1989). The problems associated with lack of support among those persons directly affected can lead to poor adherence and little interest in the success of an alcohol education program (Meichenbaum & Turk, 1987).

In addition, many alcohol education programs focus exclusively on the dangers of alcohol use and punishment. As outlined earlier, student-athletes get some positive benefits from alcohol use, such as tension reduction and face saving, and it is unlikely that they would believe that drinking is all "bad." Also, the threat of punishment or other scare tactics have seldom been effective as long-term deterrents to drinking (Damn, 1991).

PLANNING COMPREHENSIVE ALCOHOL EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR STUDENT-ATHLETES

An understanding of some of the problems with existing alcohol education programs helps in the planning and development of more effective

intervention strategies. To this end, a comprehensive alcohol education program should have the following six components: education, enhancement, support groups, counseling, follow-up, and program evaluation.

Education

Educational programs alone have not been sufficient to deter problem drinking behaviors. However, the education component is still a necessary part of the total intervention. Educational programs provide essential information to student-athletes about alcohol use, abuse, laws, and policies related to alcohol.

To plan an effective educational program, a committee of student-athletes, coaches, academic and athletic administrators, academic athletic advisors, counselors, and student affairs professionals should be assembled. The input of each of these constituencies is critical to insure support and ownership of the program (Petitpas & Champagne, 1988).

The initial charge to the committee should be to gather relevant information about alcohol use and abuse on the specific campus. While maintaining confidentiality, this data should be organized into brief lectures, case studies, and discussion questions that highlight the concerns and typical scenarios of this specific campus. These materials, along with the campus substance abuse policy (i.e., state and local laws concerning substance abuse violations and punishments for infractions) and information on how to recognize, confront, and refer teammates with drinking problems, comprise the content of the educational portion of the program.

Implementation of the educational program is particularly effective when small group discussions are held and activities are led by members of the planning committee or upperclass student-athletes who have received training in group facilitation (Petitpas & Champagne, 1988).

Enhancement

Student-athletes experience many stressors in addition to those of the typical college student (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). There is considerable evidence that adolescents drink primarily to reduce stress and negative affect (Johnston & O'Malley, 1986). Thus, a critical component of an alcohol education program is life skills training that helps student-athletes reduce stress and increase coping abilities.

Enhancement programs typically include training skills such as stress management, decision making, communication skills, peer refusal strategies, peer pressure resistance, and assertiveness training (Botvin, 1985; Botvin, Baker, Resnick, Filazzola, & Botvin, 1984; Koll & Pearman, 1990; Lenhart, 1984). It is important to note that training in life skills requires considerable time and practice to be effective (Marcell, Danish, & Stolberg, 1989). For example, Pennsylvania State University has instituted a four-year skill building program consisting of a credited health class in the first year, supplemented by

workshops and seminars during the student-athletes' sophomore, junior, and senior years (Knuttgen et al., 1990). Although this program is only in its second year, the initial evaluation data are encouraging.

By allocating sufficient time and resources for an enhancement effort, institutions not only enable student-athletes to make better choices about alcohol use, but they also assist student-athletes in becoming more resourceful people in general. The life skills that student-athletes acquire are transferable and will enable them to perform better in athletics as well as in academics and interpersonal relationships (Danish et al., 1990).

Support Groups

In developing alcohol education programs, it is important to recognize the importance of social support for drinking behaviors. Student-athletes tend to spend considerable time with other student-athletes. Many are often absorbed into a social system made up almost exclusively of other student-athletes (Remer et al., 1978). As outlined earlier, the amount of social contact, density, and closeness of support system members are correlated with the quantity and frequency of drinking (Fondacaro & Heller, 1983). Thus, the nature of the athletic environment may foster drinking as part of companionship. Changes in the types of support that student-athletes give and receive may help re-direct energies from excessive alcohol use toward healthier ways of socializing and coping with stress.

In designing a program, it is important to get input from the team leaders. These individuals often set the tone for the team and have considerable influence over new players. Virginia Commonwealth University, for instance, has developed a program, Athletes Coaching Teens (ACT), in which college student-athletes train high school athletes in the use of life skills as a way of altering health endangering behaviors. The results of this intervention indicate that the greatest improvements took place with the student-athletes who were teaching the skills. It appears that student-athletes who have had the opportunity to teach life skills may be good role models for future participants in life skills programs.

Support groups can also be helpful in addressing some of the transitional problems that college student-athletes face. Support groups have been shown to reduce stress effectively in a number of situations (Gottlieb, 1983) and may deter student-athletes from using alcohol in order to cope with negative affect. For example, at Springfield College one hour of the freshman football players' study table was set aside for small group discussions about the transition to college. Participants reported that they found this time valuable "in clearing up some of the doubts" and "allowing them to have a clear head to study."

Counseling

The goal of the counseling component of the program is to provide student-athletes who abuse alcohol with the resources to alleviate their current problem and to provide assistance in developing adequate coping skills to manage subsequent problems. Once student-athletes have been identified as having alcohol problems, the institution should have a variety of counseling and referral options available to assist them. The range of options available should include counseling with qualified substance abuse specialists, group counseling, intensive hospital-based outpatient treatment programs, and residential treatments. The options appropriate for a particular student-athlete would be dictated by the severity of the alcohol-related difficulties and the student-athlete's degree of ownership of a "drinking problem." Many of these interventions would also use Alcoholics Anonymous or other support groups as part of the treatment.

Each institution should develop working relationships with these counseling and referral services. Often these relationships have been fostered by the university counseling center or alcohol education staff as a routine function of their services. A committee on alcohol education for student-athletes, which should include representatives from the counseling center and alcohol education departments, can be particularly helpful in supporting interventions that are relevant to the life experiences of student-athletes.

Treating alcohol problems is a difficult process which often necessitates working through denial, family and social support system interventions, and changes in attitudes and coping behaviors. To have lasting impact, a complex program including life skills training and social support components is necessary (Damn, 1991). Without adequate life skills, social support, and other coping resources, relapses are likely to occur.

Follow-up

Earlier, the importance of allocating sufficient time and practice for skill acquisition was addressed and will not be repeated here. However, it should be underscored that the literature on counseling effectiveness clearly indicates that new behaviors are likely to be maintained longer if people stay in treatment longer (Meichenbaum & Turk, 1987). That is to say, the longer people are connected to a treatment intervention, the greater the likelihood that the new behaviors will be internalized and replace the older ones. Relapsing into old behaviors is most apt to happen when people are faced with new, stressful situations. Extended follow-up training and involvement enhance the chances that people will continue to practice new coping behaviors and gain additional confidence in their ability to manage stress (Meichenbaum, 1985). Therefore, alcohol education programs that encompass the four- or five-year academic experience of student-athletes are most likely to be successful.

Program Evaluation

The final component of a comprehensive program includes program evaluation. To be able to measure program success, valid baseline data on the target population's alcohol use and the types of coping behaviors employed are needed. Does the institution know how many student-athletes are using or abusing alcohol? How many student-athletes have never used alcohol? In what situations is drinking most likely to occur? What types of coping resources are used? How do student-athletes resist offers to drink? How do the drinking patterns of student-athletes compare with those of their non-athletic classmates? Gathering this kind of information allows institutions to get a valid picture of the specific usage and coping patterns that exist on their campus.

From this starting point, the effectiveness of alcohol education programs can be evaluated on a regular basis. Yearly evaluations may be useful to assess the viability of the program as well as to determine if components of the program need adjusting. Evaluation of the alcohol program should include assessment of changes in the level of alcohol use as well as changes in knowledge about alcohol use, coping resources, peer pressure resistance techniques, and other variables. It should be pointed out that well planned evaluation procedures require considerable time, money, and energy. However, the benefits of evaluation in terms of information about program effectiveness and opportunities to modify programs to enhance their impact are certainly worthy of this investment.

CONCLUSIONS

Alcohol abuse is of great concern for the population in general and college student-athletes in particular. Attempts to reduce alcohol abuse among student-athletes have resulted in various educational programs. Unfortunately, many of these "one shot" programs have proven to be less effective than initially hoped. Alcohol-related problems are extremely difficult to prevent or remediate.

It has been proposed that alcohol education programs can assist student-athletes in making better choices about alcohol use. High quality programs allow student-athletes to increase their knowledge about alcohol and its effects. However, education alone is not a sufficient strategy to address alcohol-related problems. Comprehensive programs must also provide enhancement, support, and counseling services within the framework of a well planned follow-up and evaluation process. This more thorough approach to alcohol education will enable student-athletes to learn about alcohol-related issues and will increase their ability to cope with stressful life events and peer influence without turning to alcohol abuse.

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