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Surveying Athletic Trainers on COVID-19 Incidence and Severity Among Athletes

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PURPOSE: To survey athletic trainers (ATs) and examine the experiences of their athletes during COVID-19 infection and incidence of Post-Acute Sequelae of COVID-19 (PASC). **METHODS:** ATs across various disciplines were surveyed through electronic solicitation and in collaboration with the National Athletic Trainers' Association. A comprehensive 30 question Qualtrics survey was designed to assess the severity of COVID-19 as well as presence and length of long-term sequelae. Additionally, ATs were asked about how underlying health conditions impacted their athletes' recovery, athletes' symptoms, as well as how return-to-play (RTP) protocols were implemented. The data was analyzed using Qualtrics StatsiQ. **RESULTS:** In total, 138 ATs consented to participate. Most ATs completing the survey reported their patients were between the ages of 12-25, with a large population of NCAA Division I and III athletes. ATs who participated covered many sports with the most frequently reported being men's and women's basketball, and women's volleyball. ATs (n=117) noted that they had patients with mild-moderate symptoms. However, 60 ATs noted <25% of their patients had severe symptoms, and 23 ATs reported that <25% of their patients were hospitalized. Roughly half of ATs (n=57) noted that their patients experienced PASC, with the majority lasting >4 weeks but less than 3 months. Of the 57 ATs reporting they had patients with PASC, 10 reported <25% of cases were asymptomatic, 75-95% of cases were mild-moderate, and <25% of cases were severe. ATs (n=57) felt their patients' recoveries were impacted by underlying health conditions. Asthma was the most predominant underlying condition (n=46) followed by diabetes (n=9). Furthermore, ATs reported that of these patients 60% also experienced PASC. Finally, 86% of ATs reported utilizing RTP protocols with 61.2% utilizing a gradual exercise progression. **CONCLUSION:** This survey is one of the first comprehensive evaluations of ATs experience with their patients regarding COVID-19 and PASC. Results demonstrate that while most patients had mild-moderate symptoms, some had severe symptoms and required hospitalization, deviating from the narrative that young patients were immune from severe infection. Results also demonstrate lacking uniformity in the implementation of RTP protocols.

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