

1-1-2015

Student Awareness of Professional Health Organizations

Taylor Neher



Student Awareness of Professional Health Organizations

By: Taylor Neher; Faculty Advisor: Dr. Sarah E. Toevs

Abstract

Professional organizations offer a wide range of benefits to student members. These include the provision of information about internships, careers, and service opportunities and networking (Simon, S., Webster, J., & Horn, K., 2007). The purpose of this study was to assess student awareness of health related organizations and their current involvement. Information about preferred marketing strategies and perceived benefits were also explored.

Students enrolled in university-based academic programs throughout Idaho were invited to participate in web-based anonymous survey. The survey was distributed at each institution through faculty teaching various health related courses. All study procedures were approved by the Boise State University Institutional Review Board, IRB #193-SB15-028. Findings will be shared with health related organizations, faculty, and made available on the Idaho Public Health Association's website.

Results

The findings from this study are based on responses received from 333 students enrolled in health related courses offered at public and private institutions of higher education in Idaho. The majority of respondents (70%) self-identified as upper-division or graduate students and almost half (46%) identified "direct patient care" as their career goal, see Table 1 and Figure 1 for additional information about demographic and career characteristics of respondents. Only 18% (n=67) of respondents indicated current membership in a professional organization.

The benefits of membership in a professional organization identified as being of most important were information about employment and opportunities for on-the-job mentoring, networking, and continuing education, see Table 2. The benefit identified as having "low" importance were participating in an organization that influences legislation and opportunity to present research and receive newsletters.

In an effort to understand preferred marketing strategies, respondents were asked to identify preferred methods of communication. Monthly and/or weekly emails, websites, and Facebook were identified as most effective, see Table 3.

Table 1: Demographics	
Average Age	26
Age Range	18-60
Gender	
Male	23%
Female	77%
School Attendance	
Boise State University	40%
Idaho State University	13%
BYU-Idaho	34%
University of Idaho	9%
College of Western Idaho	3%
College of Idaho	0%
Academic Standing	
Freshmen	8%
Sophomore	16%
Junior	25%
Senior	38%
Master's Program	10%
Doctoral Program	1%
Other	1%
Member of Organization	
Yes (n = 67)	18%
NO (n=310)	82%

Table 2: Benefits of Membership	
	Mean
Employment information/opportunities	3.66
Opportunities to participate in internships or other on-the-job mentoring activities	3.58
Opportunities to network with working professionals	3.54
Access to continuing educational opportunities	3.54
Resume Builder	3.46
Scholarship opportunities	3.45
Access to online resources	3.41
Communication with organizational leaders	3.36
Volunteer opportunities	3.34
Opportunities to participate in research projects	3.06
Receiving updates/newsletters	2.93
Opportunities to present research findings to other professionals	2.91
Participating in an organization that influences legislation	2.77

Note: Response options for "how beneficial are the following benefits of membership to you": 1 (unsure) to 4 (very beneficial).

Conclusion and Implications

Results reveal low rates of involvement and a general lack of awareness of the benefits membership in a professional organization can provide. As may be expected students are most interested in employment and networking opportunities. This information is of value to a broad range of professional organizations for use in the development of membership services and marketing messages. In addition, organizations may want to tailor communication strategies to reflect the identified preference for weekly an/or monthly email and or text messages.

A weakness of this study is reliance on a convenience sampling strategy. This limits the generalizability of the results particularly as they relate to Freshman and Sophomore level students. In addition, while the survey was patterned after a previous developed survey, no standardized tool exist for the collection of information of this nature.

The findings from this study provide valuable information to members of professional organizations, faculty and students. Active involvement in professional organizations has value, but marketing and communication strategies need to be tailored to meet the needs of the target population (Hall, 1993).

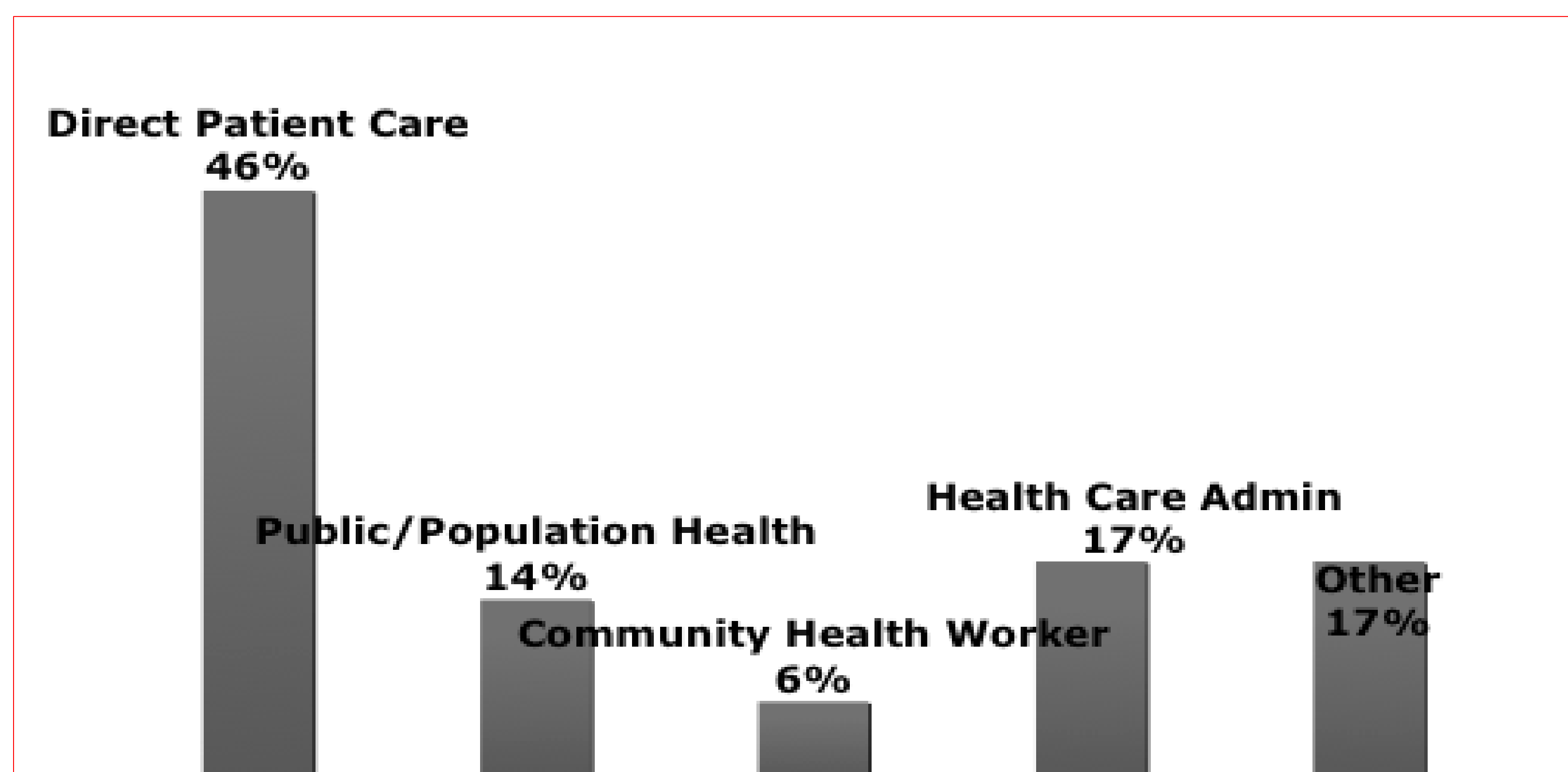


Figure 1

Table 3: Preferred Communication	
	Mean
Monthly Email	3.39
Weekly Email	3.30
Website	3.06
Facebook	3.06
Quarterly Mailed Newsletter	2.85
Linked-In	2.48
Google +	2.44
Blog Postings	2.30
Twitter	2.19

Note: Response options for "how effective are the following methods of communication": 1 (unsure) to 4 (most preferred).

Acknowledgement: The author would like to thank Dr. Sarah Toevs, Director, Master of Health Science Program, Boise State University, for all of her generous input, countless hours of suggestions and editing throughout the course of this study. Also, the members of the Board of Directors of the Idaho Public Health Association for all of their support and assistance.

References

- Hall, E. (1993). Increasing Student Involvement in Professional Organizations. *Journal Of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 64(7), 33-35. doi:10.1080/07303084.1993.10606779
- Simon, S., Webster, J., & Horn, K. (2007). A Critical Call for Connecting Students and Professional Associations. *Social Work With Groups*, 30(4), 5-19. doi:10.1300/j009v30n04_02