original research

Perceptions of Work-Life Balance Practices Offered in the Collegiate Practice Setting

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Context: Organizational factors have been identified as barriers to finding work-life balance (WLB) in athletic training. Despite the existence of organizational policies to address WLB, little is known about athletic trainers' (ATs') awareness of these policies that could assist them.

Objective: To better understand the perceptions of ATs regarding the workplace practices available to them, which may help them achieve WLB.

Design: Phenomenologic study.

Setting: Collegiate practice setting.

Patients or Other Participants: Twenty-one ATs (women = 10, men = 11) employed at the collegiate level (National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I = 12, Division II = 5, Division III = 4) volunteered for our study. The average age of the participants was 33 ± 9 years. Saturation of the data was met at n = 21.

Data Collection and Analysis: Participants completed an in-depth, 1-on-1 phone interview, which was then transcribed verbatim. Data were analyzed using a phenomenologic ap-

proach. Credibility was determined by member checks, peer review, and researcher triangulation.

Results: Our analyses revealed that participants (1) had a limited awareness of formal policies that were offered within their university or collegiate infrastructure; (2) used informal policies to manage their personal, family, and work obligations; and (3) thought that more formal policies, such as adherence to adequate staffing patterns and work schedules, could help establish WLB within collegiate athletic training settings.

Conclusions: Informal workplace policies were more commonly used by our participants and were viewed as a means of creating a supportive atmosphere. Administrators and supervisors should consider creating or endorsing more formal policies specific to the demands of an AT in the collegiate setting to help with WLB.

Key Words: human resources, policy development, workplace culture

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Key Points

- Cultural workplace support demonstrated by collegiality and supervisor support was recognized as the most common method used by athletic trainers to find work-life balance.
- More formal policies regarding work-life balance were recommended to help athletic trainers.

Work-life balance (WLB) is a critical retention factor for individuals working in health care and the sports industry.[1–5] Research specific to athletic training has demonstrated that an inability to manage personal and work obligations contributes to decreased retention.[1–5] The literature[3–14] suggested that a confluence of factors contribute to WLB challenges and turnover, including long work hours, lack of control over work schedules, high patient or athlete-to-practitioner ratios, role strain, burnout, fatigue, low pay scales, and a misunderstanding of organizational culture. Similarly, successful retention and management strategies for WLB include flexible work schedules, appropriate staffing patterns, and individual employee adjustments to find balance.[14] The wide range of factors that contribute to athletic trainer (AT) retention, both individually and within an organization,[1,3,5–9] is understood, yet the efficacy of implemented WLB programs in athletic training has not been articulated in the literature.

Organizations have begun to institute work-life policies to address concerns related to WLB, including family leave, flexible schedules, on-site day care, and customized strategies for individual needs.[7,14] Often, these policies are viewed as structural work-life support because they are established by the human resources department and are designed to alter the structure of one's work (eg, place of work, timing of work)[15] to allow for improved WLB. Establishing cooperative work environments that highlight teamwork and job sharing, implementing work boundaries, and prioritizing daily work and nonwork tasks may be effective in supporting WLB and ultimately increasing retention.[14] Informal workplace support, as previously described, is also important in the WLB framework. Cultural work-life support is gained from coworkers and supervisors who help provide a workplace that values work, family, and life roles and perceives them to be equally important.[15] Cultural work-life support is critical in athletic training for improved WLB and, in many cases, retention of

the AT.[14,16] Thus far, WLB concerns in athletic training have been described as involving gender, parenting, employment setting, position, socialization, mentoring,[6,7,10,11] and management.[14] These investigations suggested that most ATs perceived similar WLB challenges, regardless of personal characteristics or employment status.

Although the literature has expanded, a void remains in discerning the perceptions of ATs' needs in fulfilling WLB. Specifically, we need to understand what current structural and cultural work-life support policies are required to help ATs navigate work, family, and life roles. Understanding WLB relative to employment trends and needs of ATs has implications for educational advising, employer management of human capital, and policy and legislative matters. The literature[3,14,15] has improved our understanding of WLB factors and accommodation strategies for ATs, yet employees' perceptions of current workplace practices and their effectiveness in creating WLB have not been investigated. Thus, the purpose of our study was to understand the perceptions of ATs regarding workplace practices intended to help address their WLB needs. We were guided by the following questions: (1) What were the perceptions and general awareness of WLB policies for ATs, and (2) what types of policies did ATs often use to pursue WLB?

METHODS

Design

We used a qualitative approach, specifically a phenomenologic design, to explore the perceptions of ATs regarding workplace practices that help address their WLB needs. We selected this approach for its goal of understanding individuals' lived experiences through in-depth interviews and discussions with those who meet the criteria being studied.[17] The phenomenologic approach to data collection emphasizes the importance of the personal perspective and interpretation of the phenomenon.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

A convenience- and snowball-sampling strategy was used to recruit participants[18] after we secured institutional review board approval from the University of Connecticut. All participants were currently employed in the collegiate setting and represented a variety of life stages, including single, married, and married with children. The selection of the collegiate practice setting was purposeful as National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) membership statistics indicated that it was one of the largest employment settings for ATs and often displayed the greatest level of attrition or concerns related to career commitment due to WLB.[19] Sampling was purposeful,[18] as the overall aim of the study was to gain a holistic picture of the WLB policies and benefits available to ATs employed in the collegiate clinical setting. Data saturation guided recruitment and was reached at 21 participants.

Twenty-one ATs (women = 10, men =11) employed at the collegiate level (National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA] Division I = 12, Division II = 5, Division III = 4) volunteered for our study. We present their demographic information in the Table. The average age of the participants was 33 ± 9 years. Fourteen participants were

married, and 7 were single. Of the 14 married participants, 8 reported having children. All participants who had children were married (single = 7, married = 6, married with children = 8). Participants worked an average of 56 ± 9 hours per week and represented 6 NATA districts (District 1 = 7, District 2 = 4, District 3 = 6, District 4 = 2, District 6 = 1, District 8 = 1).

Data-Collection Procedures

Participants completed an in-depth, 1-on-1 interview with a researcher (C.M.E.). Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and followed a script developed specifically for the study. The interview guide was structured; however, a natural dialogue between the interviewee and researcher allowed for greater understanding of the interviewee's experiences as they pertained to WLB and policies and practices in the collegiate setting. The interview guide (Appendix) we developed to investigate the study's agenda was guided by current literature[5,7,14] and our knowledge of the topic. Before data collection, a peer researcher evaluated the interview guide for clarity and content. The peer was an experienced qualitative researcher with extensive knowledge of the WLB concept in sport and athletic training. The interview guide was updated based on the feedback, which included grammatical edits, clarifications, and additional questions. All interview sessions were recorded and then transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data Analysis

Following the guidelines for a phenomenologic approach, we analyzed the data using a stepwise method. Transcripts were read thoroughly to gain a sense of the data and the common experiences of our participants. Two authors (S.M.M., C.M.E.) used field notes to highlight trends in the data, especially as the information pertained to our primary agenda. Our field notes helped us categorize the data during each subsequent reading. We used each reading of the data as a means to group and organize the data into themes, which reflected the operational definition of the dominant theme. This process is referred to as *clustering the data*,[17,18] and it helps to identify the data that provided structure and context to the presentation of the themes. Two researchers followed this process to establish multiple-analyst triangulation.

Data Credibility

Phenomenologic researchers[17,20] suggested that interpretative validity must occur, which happens when the participant is involved in the final verification of the findings. Therefore, upon completion of the analysis, we selected 3 participants to review the results. We provided them with the written report of the results and asked them to comment and reflect on our findings and to compare them to their perceptions and experiences. The process, which occurred via e-mail, yielded support for our analyses. Trustworthiness was also established by researcher triangulation as previously discussed, whereby 2 researchers (S.M.M. and C.M.E.) completed the data analysis. Peer review confirmed the final presentation of the findings. The peer reviewer, a seasoned researcher with a strong

Table.   Individual Demographic Data for Participants

Pseudonym	Sex	Age, y	National Collegiate Athletic Association Division	Marital Status	Children?	National Athletic Trainers' Association District	Average h/wk Worked
Abby	Female	26	I	S	No	3	55
Adam	Male	31	II	M	Yes	3	50
Bella	Female	33	I	M	Yes	1	60
Bob	Male	54	II	M	Yes	3	57.5
Danielle	Female	33	I	S	No	6	50
Doug	Male	29	II	M	No	1	60
Dylan	Male	27	III	M	No	1	50
Emma	Female	26	I	S	No	2	50
Gina	Female	27	III	M	No	3	55
Jason	Male	41	I	M	Yes	3	50
Kaylyn	Female	29	I	M	No	2	75
Martha	Female	32	I	M	Yes	2	40
Mary	Female	23	I	S	No	1	50
Matt	Male	29	I	S	No	3	64
Mike	Male	35	II	M	Yes	1	55
Paul	Male	28	III	S	No	4	70
Phil	Male	28	I	M	No	1	60
Rachel	Female	25	I	S	No	2	55
Riley	Female	42	II	M	No	8	65
Sawyer	Male	38	III	M	Yes	1	40
Tom	Male	53	I	M	Yes	4	57

Abbreviations: M, married; S, single.

background in the WLB paradigm, was independent of the data-collection process.

RESULTS

Our participants were unaware of formal WLB policies that were offered within their collegiate institutions; used informal policies to manage their personal, family, and work obligations; and thought that establishing more formal policies, such as adherence to adequate staffing patterns and work schedules, could help establish WLB within the collegiate athletic training setting. A full discussion of each finding is presented in the next sections with data generated from our interviews. All participants were assigned pseudonyms.

Knowledge of University Policy

We asked participants to describe their WLB and any formal benefits they believed their current employment setting offered them. Discussions of these benefits were focused solely on items pertaining to leave, mostly federally mandated benefits regarding child care and maternity and paternity leave. Riley shared, "the only one I am aware of is maternity leave." She explained, "If you don't have kids, you don't get any extended time off. I mean we have vacation days and that kind of stuff, but I don't think I took my first vacation until after working here 6 years. We can create flex time but do not have flexible schedules as offered by the university."

Like Riley and several other participants, Kaylyn was aware of "maternity leave": "I don't know if we have paternity leave." Kaylyn was married but did not have children yet; therefore, her awareness of policies related to WLB could have been influenced by her family status. Others, such as Gina and Emma, who also did not have children, were not aware of policies beyond maternity and

paternity leave. Danielle's comments supported this possibility:

I would assume they [my workplace] do some sort of maternity stuff here, but I don't really know yet because I don't have kids. I know people here who have had kids the last couple years have disappeared for a while.

Adam was honest about his lack of awareness of policies that could benefit him, particularly related to WLB and family time. He said, "I don't really know." Much like Adam, Jason commented, "I mean I don't know if there are any policies. I mean in terms of specific details." It was interesting that Adam felt as though "paternity leave" was not a benefit or policy that he could have used because of his in-season sport and medical care responsibilities:

This will be funny, ironic given the conversation about WLB, but all 4 of my children have been [born] during the athletic year. They were born during the academic year (October, March, April), times when things are busy. I wasn't able to take advantage of paternity leave.

Of the 21 participants, only 4 were able to discuss organizational policies beyond maternity and paternity leave. That is, a few discussed working-time arrangements (eg, hours worked), child-care options, and tuition reimbursement as policies that directly influenced WLB.

Informal Workplace Policies

Participants were asked to reflect on their own WLB and ways they and their organizations supported it. Informal policies were a primary facilitator for participants, who described supervisors' mind-sets and coworkers' support as most important. Jason's remarks about his current situation and managing his personal and family obligations reflected a supervisor who supported family needs:

There has never been a time when something has come up with my family that our head athletic trainer has not supported me. There has never been a time when he said, "Oh well you need to go find someone to cover you" (if I need to leave early or get my sick child). So, yeah, I think it is a family benefit, but it's not something that human resources has formally dictated. It is just the atmosphere we live in.

Bella's reflections and experiences mirrored Jason's as she discussed the support and mind-set of her supervisor in regard to WLB and family and personal obligations:

I just tell my supervisor if a conflict comes up or I need to do something. He tells me to figure it out. He is not going to be the one to say you can't do it. He may say as long as you can find coverage or have it covered, go ahead.

The mind-set of the supervisor was important to participants regardless of their current family and marital status. For example, Danielle described the supportive attitude of her supervisor in managing her personal obligations:

My supervisor will help me strategize and problem solve so that whatever my responsibilities are they can be covered. If it is a wedding or, for instance, my grandmother passed a few years ago, and so a basketball staff member who was not current[ly] in-season provid[ed] care in my absence, so that I could go home.

Doug had a similar reflection on his supervisor's role in creating WLB in the workplace, saying, "My supervisor is extremely good at allowing me to have balance. I don't think there has been one time that he's ever denied any time off that I needed for any sort of reason. He just makes it work."

Supervisor support and embracing of a WLB mind-set was important as an informal policy, but also important were coworker support and sharing of the workload. Bella showcased this policy as she noted, "My boss is supportive and allows balance to happen, but my coworkers are the ones who are stepping in and doing it." Bella further addressed the role her coworkers played in the workplace as a means to facilitate balance: "My coworkers are completely responsible for helping me, so they are the ones who will step up and in to cover my practice or whatever I need so that I can do what I need to do."

Sawyer, much like Bella, depicted a workplace that included supportive coworkers, sharing the workload, and being a team—a climate that helped stimulate and foster WLB. Sawyer said, "We kind of do work as a team within our own department. The 4 of us—if something comes up with someone else, we just are there to cover for one another." When discussing WLB and specifically the ways in which he was able to overcome challenges, Sawyer attributed his success to his coworkers: "They help create balance. If I need a practice covered, I can reach out to one of them and its really nice— in 3 years it hasn't ever been an issue."

Other participants, including Dylan, Jason, Paul, Abby, and Martha, described circumstances in which their coworkers assisted when a conflict arose, whether for a wedding or concert (a personal interest) or a child who was sick or had an appointment (family-related concerns). Coworkers provided assistance by supplying patient care on any given day, as long as notice was given. The support from coworkers meant that work schedules could sometimes be altered so that employees could take care of tasks in their personal lives or be present for life events outside of work. In regard to the WLB atmosphere at his current workplace, Mike said, "We all sort of take care of sharing the load. If someone needs a day off or something, we just try to make it work."

Workplace integration also emerged as a policy that was available to ATs but mostly in an informal capacity. That is, participants discussed blending work and personal time as a means of accomplishing various roles in the home, personal, and work domains. For example, an AT without child care for the day might bring the child to work while still providing medical care for patients. Or an AT might respond to e-mails or write progress notes at home, while being present for dinnertime or a dance recital. Simply stated, the borders between work, personal, and family roles were considered permeable rather than definitive. Paul used a daily schedule to create time in the day to accomplish tasks, including personal time and home responsibilities:

I carve out a couple hours during the workday, when I can, to get my workout in and then go home to walk the dog. If I have other errands to run, I do that as well, and not just stay at work to stay there to wait for things to happen.

As a means to create WLB and "integrate her day," Gina made sure to go home at the end of the work day, especially if all treatments and direct medical care were complete. Any other work tasks that needed to be accomplished could be addressed at home, so she could be with her family. She explained, "When I am at work, I am at work. Once the day is done, I am able to say if somebody needs me or whatever and it's appropriate, they can reach me at home."

Gina and Paul also discussed that this mind-set of integration was supported at the supervisor level, which was important for them to be able to capitalize on it. Phil articulated the idea of integration when he commented on how he was able to manage all of his responsibilities at both work and home: "Sometimes when you come in the mornings (open for 8 AM), you might take a workout break (12 PM) or lunch break to go out with friends, or really whatever you need to do. On mornings that you don't have treatments, you can get things done. Use your downtimes for work stuff, and vice versa."

The Need for Formal Policies

Despite the use of informal WLB policies, our participants recognized the need for more structured policies to help ensure WLB. Two main policies were popular among participants: adequate staffing (adhering to the NATA's recommendations and the "Appropriate Medical Coverage of Intercollegiate Athletics"[21] guidelines) and work scheduling.

Jason noted the need for more universities to have enough full-time staff members to share the responsibilities

and workload. With enough full-time staff, it is possible not only to share the workload but also to reduce the number of hours worked each day. Jason stated, "It is a little better now I think, but yeah, you have to have enough people to cover things." Kaylyn suggested that "having more staff to provide team coverage would create less... year-long travel... [and cover] things that make the days long or time away hard." Riley was specific:

> We need to adhere to the appropriate medical coverage. It hasn't garnered a lot of support within athletics, but it's a tool I keep trying to use to get more staff. I would like to see the NCAA take it more seriously.

Work-scheduling concerns reflected 2 main factors: having a designated day off via supervisor scheduling and having stricter policies on providing medical care only during the day (ie, 6 AM to 6 PM). Several participants discussed the importance of having a particular day off during the workweek as a means to plan ahead and to maintain some sense of normalcy by seeing friends or having family time. Paul observed, "It's nice to know when I will have some time off. I can plan to see friends." Tom mentioned that "having that day that can be about family, that's helpful." Adam's current job was at a religious university that mandated no Sunday activities; thus, he was able to plan a day for family and personal activities to which he attributed his success in achieving WLB: "My wife and I can plan that I am off on Sunday all day, and that allows us to plan a little bit. It is certainly helpful."

Phil discussed wanting more formal policies to create more structure in the workday and thus more WLB, such as "policies to start practices on time, or when they can have practice. Sometimes there is a lot of scrambling with practices and I can be here late, especially for basketball." Danielle wanted a system that limited the time the AT was available or on-call for the coaches or student-athletes. She said, "I wish there was a way, here, to get everyone on the same page and on board to understand our role. The perception that the AT is always there needs to change." Kaylyn discussed the negative effect collegiate athletics can have on WLB, with the "insanely long" schedule, especially given all the responsibilities occurring throughout the day rather than in a condensed period of time. She hoped her university would develop a policy on practice schedules and timing: "I think it would be helpful, you know, if our university had some policy about practices at 6 AM, especially if we have other obligations and practices to cover later that day." Others described how changing schedules could affect WLB, and many wanted policies requiring schedule changes to be communicated within 24 or 48 hours and for coaches to be "realistic with timing of practices" and "expectations to schedule multiple practices, team activities, etc, throughout the day, which impact the day of the athletic trainer." Mary requested a policy that required "coaches to get approval to have practice at different times, or some communication with the athletic trainer."

DISCUSSION

Outside of athletic training, many organizations are devoting resources to help promote WLB among employ-ees,[15] and although WLB is a concern for ATs, many are unaware of the policies offered by their employers. Kossek et al[15] suggested that for some, initiatives related to WLB were marginalized and might not completely address the needs of employees within an organization. For example, the higher education institution may have formal human resources department policies related to such topics as flextime, child care, and leaves of absence for elder care or maternal care. Many organizations also offer WLB policies that are inherent to the nature and culture of a workplace and are created by the supervisors and employees. For example, a formal policy regarding flexible work arrange-ments might not be available, yet a supervisor (eg, head AT) may provide autonomy to the staff to establish work routines that address job expectations as well as personal and family needs. Together, these types of policies and offerings allow WLB to be achieved. For ATs in the collegiate setting, nontraditional work-scheduling options, such as teleworking and flexible work schedules, are not likely to be available because of the nature of the setting and the job requirement for face time and employees being present to provide direct patient care. In fact, ATs capitalized on few formal benefits, which may reflect a culture that limits their comfort in using some policies (eg, paternity leave) or lack of awareness of these various benefits offered by higher education institutions. The latter may indicate that these policies were not being communi-cated to employees during the formal new-hire orientation. In the future, we believe, a more in-depth look at WLB policies in higher education is warranted, particularly regarding knowledge, awareness, and use.

Knowledge of University Policy

Work-life balance policies can generally be classified in 3 broad categories: working-time arrangements (eg, hours worked, work scheduling), parental-leave entitlements (eg, maternity, paternity), and child care (eg, subsidies,[22] on-site day care[23]). Our participants were cognizant of parental-leave entitlements, specifically maternity and paternity leave, but did not fully comprehend other WLB benefits their institutions offered. Given that 67% (14) of partici-pants were married and 38% (8) of those were parents, our finding that this workplace policy was the most familiar makes sense. Individuals who had children likely used parental leave, and married individuals might have been at a life stage when they considered having children, so they would likely look into available parental-leave policies. Moreover, maternity and paternity leave is a common benefit afforded working individuals to address their family needs. Other more formal WLB policies that are typically available include sick or personal time, vacation time, professional development (time off, stipends), and alterna-tive work arrangements,[24] and ATs should take advantage of these. Policies that are designed to address the WLB needs of the employee are often discussed at new-hire orientation sessions; thus, employees have an early opportunity to learn about the institution's offerings. Moreover, human resources departments typically have Web sites that detail this information. It is important for ATs to be aware of policies that can directly and positively influence their WLB. Directly accessing the human resources departmental Web site at their place of

employment is one step toward becoming educated on those policies; another step is reaching out to their supervisors for guidance. Many institutions and organizations recognize the importance of WLB initiatives and offer employees mechanisms to achieve balance.[12,14,24–26] Examples of these initiatives vary, with organizational autonomy guiding development and offerings, but at the fundamental level, organizations may offer sick or paid time off, flextime, tuition reimbursement, paternity and maternity leave, gym memberships, and child care (on-site or reimbursement).[22,25]

Within the collegiate setting specifically, ATs can benefit from tuition reimbursement or professional-development funding, on-site child care (many institutions have early childhood programs), and on-site fitness facilities, which can offer employees better WLB. Despite these formal policies that can enhance WLB or improve quality of life, no participants were aware of or used them. We recognize that this qualitative study did not identify the various policies available, and thus, participants may have overlooked them.

In 2013, *Forbes* magazine listed the best companies to work for in terms of achieving WLB. The following key WLB benefits were identified: ensure vacation time is used for rejuvenation, offer opportunities for continued professional development and career advancement, employ enough staff members to meet the work demands, and provide creative solutions to child care and family obligations through on-site child care and flexible work schedules.[25] The *Forbes* recommendations speak to a mindset that embraces flexibility and the need to address the individual needs of the person, particularly from managerial and administrative perspectives.

Informal Workplace Policies

Organizational culture reflects the collective beliefs and values of the workplace and its coworkers and supervisors. In direct reference to WLB, organizational culture can be defined by structural and cultural support.[15] *Structural support* is reflected by human resources departmental policies that allow the AT to address professional and personal responsibilities (eg, working hours, sick time) and are documented and enforced through formal mechanisms. *Cultural support* encompasses the more informal aspects of the workplace, that is, the social and relational norms created in the workplace via supervisor and coworker relationships and interactions.[15] Culture in a workplace is often derived from the leader, not only from his or her personal beliefs about WLB and its importance but also from how the leader models the importance of finding WLB.[15] When a supervisor supports the staff and advocates for them to have balance in their lives, they are more satisfied and want to remain in their positions.[26,27] Head ATs can serve as gatekeepers for WLB and should demonstrate a sense of balance or at least note its value.[27]

Our findings speak to the strong cultural support received by our participants and the value they saw in the support of their supervisors and coworkers. Participants discussed the shared values of their workplaces, where supervisors and coworkers valued family time as much as work time; in recognition of the demands of their positions, they found ways to be good employees[15,28] and alleviate the strains and

stress that can accompany irregular work hours and inflexible work schedules. Supportive networks in the workplace have emerged as a fundamental aspect of the WLB initiatives within athletic training by helping to create flexibility in an environment that often offers very little[14] and reducing the spillover of work demands into nonwork roles. Supervisors should not only support these initiatives but also encourage their presence in the workplace. Coworkers should appreciate the benefit this can have on flexibility and WLB; however, it is important to not abuse or take advantage of the concept (eg, the single AT should not always cover for the married AT).

Although coworker support can reduce the effect of the time demands placed on the AT, supervisor support has emerged as critical to WLB initiatives in athletic training. As our participants described, having a supervisor who recognizes and supports ATs in meeting their personal and family needs is vital. Supervisors are often described as the moderators or informal gatekeepers of WLB initiatives and employees' fulfillment[15] as they live in the "day-to-day trenches" and are aware of their employees' needs and responsibilities inside and outside the workplace. Mazerolle et al[14] found that supervisors who shared and were aware of their employees' needs were helpful in fostering WLB for the AT. Furthermore, a supervisor who embodies a philosophy that is WLB minded can help create cohesion and a culture that, despite the demands placed on the AT, can support balance and satisfaction.[29]

Individuals who felt supported and were allowed to achieve their personal goals and interests were more productive and loyal, which are critical values, not only in fostering a cohesive workplace environment but also in increasing the likelihood that WLB needs are being addressed.[26] The creation of WLB will likely come from multiple avenues[2,30] and therefore should include top-down support (the supervisor understands the importance of family and personal time), connections (support inside and outside the workplace), and personal tools (time management, communication).[31]

The Need for Formal Policies

Mazerolle et al[32] recommended implementing formal WLB policies in the collegiate setting to help the AT create balance, without having the uncertainties that can stem from informal policies. Many organizations have formal policies to promote WLB (eg, flexible work schedules, job sharing), but these are not always options for professionals working in sport settings. The unique aspects of this work setting include its dynamic nature, the need to be physically present to meet job demands, and the expectations of coaches and others regarding the importance of relationships created with the AT. Participants identified 2 specific policies that could affect their ability to find WLB in the collegiate setting: adhering to the "Appropriate Medical Coverage of Intercollegiate Athletics" guidelines[21] and formal medical-coverage policies. Both are feasible changes in the collegiate setting and fall into the work-time arrangement category for WLB priorities.[23] *Work-time arrangement* is a broad umbrella term that refers to employees' having the chance and freedom to structure their work day as benefits them professionally and personally. Examples include split shifts (work 6 AM to

10 AM and then 2 PM to 6 PM) and compressed workweeks (3- to 4-hour and 10- to 12-hour shifts).[23] Simply stated, our participants wanted policies that helped them manage the time commitments of their positions and believed that having adequate staff and medical care policies that designated working hours would have the most effect. These findings were supported by recommendations from Mazerolle et al[32] regarding the structure of medical care and coverage polices to allow the AT to establish a more reasonable workload. Moreover, when the department has an appropriate number of staff members, managing the medical care and coverage needs of the institution is easier.

The NATA, in recognition of the changing atmosphere of collegiate athletics (eg, more women's teams, nontraditional seasons, and conditioning sessions), has developed a system for colleges and universities to quantify the amount of medical care required based on their specific needs.[21] However, many colleges and universities are unable to fully meet these recommendations and guidelines, as they lack enough full-time staff members.[33] Many participants identified the need for more ATs on staff to fully address not only the needs of the student-athletes but also their own personal lives. Staffing shortages are not unique to athletic training within the collegiate setting; the NCAA[34] has acknowledged the growing demands placed on workers and has linked staffing shortages to this demand, along with the nature of the setting, which is associated with a continuous work schedule. Perhaps the first mechanism to address staffing shortages is to use the guidelines and recommendations and worksheets created by the NATA[21] to illustrate the needs of the sports medicine staff and to communicate the concerns outlined in the NCAA's *A Matter of Balance* handbook.[34] Together these resources make a compelling argument that can help the sports medicine staff create a more formal balance in the workplace.

Irregular work schedules, lack of control over work schedules, and long working hours are the major contributors to work-life conflict or imbalance for the AT[8,32]; thus, it is understandable that participants want more formal workplace policies to address these concerns. Mazerolle et al[32] encouraged supervisors to develop specific guidelines regarding practice times and changes to those practice times as a means of reducing negative effects on the AT's WLB. Frequent and planned communication, although a more informal practice, can also help staff adhere to the formal medical-care–coordination policies and decrease the chance of problems arising due to last-minute changes in the schedule. Communication must include all athletic training staff members as well as coaches, administrators, and student-athletes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From our data, we make the following suggestions and recommendations regarding WLB in the collegiate setting:

1. Athletic trainers, regardless of their marital and family status, should be aware of both structural and cultural policies that can help them achieve WLB. Structural policies include work scheduling, child care, and time off, whereas cultural policies may include supportive mind-sets and creative ways to address medical care.

2. Developing work schedules that can help the AT accommodate personal and family needs is critical.

This may include policies related to medical-care coordination, changes in practice schedules, and other aspects related to communicating expectations and medical care for the student-athlete (eg, e-mail, text messages).

3. Supervisors and coworkers should be open to job sharing and other methods of creating flexibility within the work schedules of collegiate ATs.

4. The guidelines developed by the NATA for appropriate medical care should be used by all sports medicine staffs to advocate for appropriate staffing that can both reduce the workloads of the ATs and improve the care provided to student-athletes. The recommendations for appropriate medical coverage of intercollegiate athletics are available on the NATA Web site: http://www.nata.org/sites/default/files/AMCIA.[21]

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

We recognize that our sample represents a small number of ATs employed at various levels of the collegiate setting as well as various demographic attributes (eg, age, marital status). Our study was exploratory and meant to offer a general understanding of the ATs' awareness of WLB initiatives and those that are available to them currently as a means of creating balance. Thus, our findings cannot be generalized to all ATs working in the collegiate or other settings. Future authors should examine various employment settings and different levels within collegiate athletics.

We collected our data with the intention of gaining the perceptions of our sample in regard to WLB and those policies that may help them achieve it. We did not measure the frequency with which these initiatives were used or collect a list of the policies and programs in current use. Therefore, we believe that assembling a more robust list of policies used in collegiate athletics as well as an appreciation of their effectiveness and how frequently they are used would be helpful in continuing to advocate for ATs' WLB in the collegiate setting.

CONCLUSIONS

Our sample population did not have a comprehensive understanding of the more formal workplace policies for WLB. That being said, several useful informal mechanisms appeared to be in place for the AT in the collegiate setting. Informal policies create the cultural dynamic in the workplace, which in this setting can be positive and effective in establishing WLB. Although formal workplace policies (eg, flexible schedules, staffing patterns) were scarce, many feasible options do exist.

Appendix. Interview Questions[a]

1. Can you share a little bit about your career? (prompts: how did you get interested in AT, what drew you to the profession)
2. What aspects of your current position do you enjoy?
3. Is there anything about your current position that you would like to change? Please describe.

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[a] Instrument is presented in its original form.

4. What does work-life balance mean to you?
   a. When you hear the terms "*work*" and "*life*" what does that mean to you?
   b. Work/family/life balance is often defined as *satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict*. How would you assess your work life balance based upon that definition?
5. Is there anything that inhibits your ability to achieve balance?
   a. Prompt: Can you speak to those factors that are a primary factor of your current employment setting?
   b. Prompt: Can you speak to those factors that are a primary factor in your life?
6. What strategies have you found to be effective in your ability to find work-life balance?
7. How would you describe your current workplace, specifically in regards to your ability to find work-life balance? (Prompt: would it be described as a providing you with the ability to meet the your nonwork interests and obligations?)
8. Organizations have developed "family-friendly benefits" including interventions such as flexible work schedules, childcare referrals, and leaves of absence. Are there any formal policies available to you to help you accommodate your personal and professional needs?
9. What formal policies, would you like to see offered, that would benefit you and your needs regarding your family and outside life?
10. Are there any other interventions/policies available to you to help you achieve work-life balance?
11. If a conflict arises between your work and personal life, what is the role of your supervisor? Please explain.
    a. Is your supervisor supportive of your needs?
       i. Can you provide an example of something you viewed as supportive that your supervisor has done for you over the last month or so?
       ii. Do you have an example of a behavior that you viewed as unsupportive?
    b. How would you describe your supervisor as a leader, as a manager?
    c. What role do they play in your ability to find work life balance?
12. If a conflict arises, what is the role of your co-workers?
    a. What role do they play in your ability to find work life balance?
13. How would you make the athletic training profession suitable for work-life balance?
    a. Are there any specific policies that you would like to see implemented?

Abbreviation: AT, athletic training.

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