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Mental Health in College Athletes: An OT Perspective

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Background

Many student athletes report feeling a lack of preparedness when transitioning from high school to college sports, and many college athletes are not seeking help with their mental health due to lack of time and knowledge about mental health resources that are available to them (Harrison, 2019). Student's often report feeling a lack of balance between academics, athletics, and social life (Gill, 2008). When negative mental health is present, this can lead to ill performance and injury (Moore, 2017). Occupational therapists are equipped with the knowledge to address mental health and help this population through addressing job performance and creating healthy habits and routines.

Problem

There is often increased stigma surrounding college athletes in the spotlight, thus preventing them from seeking help with their mental health (Kaier et al., 2015). There are currently no known programs that offer resources specifically for college athletes (Sudano & Miles, 2016). It is important for occupational therapists to advocate for mental health resources for student athletes to create healthy habits and routines within the athletic environment.

Purpose

The purpose of this capstone was to increase awareness of mental health resources that are available to student athletes and coaching staff at Baldwin Wallace University to improve mental health in athletics and on campus.

Methods

During this capstone process, a needs assessment was conducted, and four resources were created to inform students and coaching staff about mental health and approaches to managing it.

Participants/Setting: Student athletes and coaching staff both in-season and out of season at Baldwin Wallace University.

Needs Assessment: A needs assessment was conducted through an anonymous google survey to better understand the current mental health status of student athletes, their knowledge of mental health resources on campus, and their support systems.

Implementation: Educational resources were created to provide to both coaching staff and student athletes regarding mental health.

Deliverables

What is Mental Health?: For Coaching Staff

- Educational PDF containing statistics, barriers to seeking help, and risk factors
- Created to help athletic department staff better understand what mental health can look like in student athletes

Assisting College Athletes with Mental Health: For Coaching Staff

- Educational PDF containing information on how to assist student athletes with a mental health episode/crisis, risk factors to address with student athletes, and how to create an open mental health policy within a team atmosphere
- Created to help athletic department staff handle mental health episodes in student athletes

Mental Health for Student Athletes

- An educational PDF containing information on free mental health resources that Baldwin Wallace University provides to their students, student organizations relating to mental health, and information on how to handle a mental health episode in the moment
- Created to help improve student athlete awareness of resources on campus and improve mental health

Take a Brain Break

- A flyer created with a QR code that led to the PDF that contained information on free mental health resources for students
- These flyers were posted in locker rooms and on the back of bathroom stall doors around campus

