The impact of sport psychology education on the practice of physiotherapists

Conference or Workshop Item

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Introduction

The occurrence of a sports injury can lead to several negative psychological reactions such as frustration, anger, anxiety and depression (e.g. Carson & Polman, 2008; Tracey, 2003). Sport psychology intervention has been shown to benefit sports injury rehabilitation (Armatas et al., 2007; Levy et al., 2006), however, it would appear that deficiencies in the training of sports psychologists in this area may be acting as a barrier to injured athletes receiving sport psychology support during rehabilitation. Generally research has shown that sport psychologists recognise the importance of psychological factors, but lack the training to utilise sport psychology (Arvan-Barnow et al., 2007). Within the research in this field there is almost universal agreement that the training of sports injury rehabilitation professionals (SRIPs), including sport psychologists, in sport psychology is inadequate (e.g. Arvan-Barnow et al., 2010; Heaney, 2006), and SRIPs consistently express a desire to develop their knowledge of sport psychology theory and practice (e.g. Arvan-Barnow et al., 2007; Heaney, 2006).

In light of these findings it has been suggested that sport psychology education is likely to have a positive impact on the sport psychology related behaviours of SRIPs (Arvan-Barnow et al., 2007; Hamson-Utley et al., 2008; Heaney, 2006). However, to date, only a limited number of studies (Harris et al., 2005; Clement & Shannon, 2009; Stiller-Ostrowski et al., 2008; Peters & Sachs, 1997) have delivered a sport psychology education package and measured its impact and all have examined US athletic trainer populations, with the majority of these being student populations. This would suggest that further research is needed examining a broader range of SRIPs, including those who are already qualified, since it has been suggested that those already qualified are also in need of sport psychology training (Arvan-Barnow et al., 2007; Hamson-Utley et al., 2008; Heaney, 2006).

Objective: The purpose of this investigation was to examine the impact of a sport psychology education package on qualified UK physiotherapists working in sport.

Method

Participants

The participants were 135 physiotherapists who responded to an invitation to participate in the study. Sixty-seven were randomly assigned to the intervention (sport psychology) group and 68 participants were randomly assigned to the control group. Of these 135 physiotherapists 93 completed all stages of post-module follow-up (44 intervention group and 51 control group) and only data from these participants are analysed in the study. The intervention group (n=24) comprised 23 males and 21 females and had a mean age of 33.70 years (SD ± 8.16) The control group (n=51) comprised 26 males and 25 females and had a mean age of 36.11 years (SD ± 8.78).

Measures

Data was collected through a series of online questionnaires completed on four occasions over a six month period (1 pre-module, 2 post-module and 3 post-module follow-up). The content of this section varied between the four questionnaires, but included areas such as demographics, information, referral to a sport psychologist, further study, perceived use of sport psychology and perceptions of the module.

Procedure

After completing an informed consent form participants were randomly assigned to either the intervention group or the control group and asked to complete the pre-module questionnaire. Upon completing this questionnaire participants were given the web address to access their module.

Participants

In the intervention group studied an online module entitled ‘Sport Psychology for Physiotherapists’. This module was split into three units and required approximately 12 hours of study. Participants in the control group studied an online module entitled ‘Strength and Conditioning for Physiotherapists’, which was similar to the module ‘Sport Psychology for Physiotherapists’ in terms of structure, length, delivery and assessment, but contained no sport psychology content.

The module invited participants to complete three assessments and participate in the module forum and data was collected on participants’ engagement in these activities. Those successfully completing all three assessments were awarded a certificate of completion.

Immediately following completion of the module, participants were directed to complete the first post-module questionnaire. Participants were then contacted three months after finishing the module and asked to complete a second post-module questionnaire and were then contacted once more six months after the module to complete the final post-module questionnaire.

Results

Attitude Towards Sport Psychology

The total score on the PIUS questionnaire over time for the two participant groups is summarised in the graph below.

Use of Sport Psychology

The total score on the PIUS questionnaire over time for the two participant groups is summarised in the graph below.

Psychology Module – Likes:

Perceptions of the Module

Data was collected regarding participants’ perceptions of the module. Initially, immediately following completion of the module (POST1), participants were asked to rate how beneficial they found the module on a scale of 1 to 10. The ratings given by the participants are summarised below. The sport psychology group had a mean score of 8, with 75% of the group giving a score of 7 or above. The control group also had a mean score of 8, with 77% of the group giving a score of 7 or above.

The control group (n=51) comprised 26 males and 25 females and had a mean age of 36.11 years (SD ± 8.78).

Motivation for Further Study

On completion of the module participants were asked if they were motivated to undertake any further study, either formal or informal, related to the topic they had studied. They were then asked at 3-months and 6-months post completion whether they had undertaken any such study. The percentage of participants who planned to or undertook further study is shown in the table below.

Discussion/Conclusions

Preliminary data analysis suggests that studying the sport psychology module had a positive impact on the physiotherapists, with both attitudes towards and use of sport psychology improving following completion of the module. Most significantly use of sport psychology strategies was maintained during the 6 months following the completion of the module indicating a positive longitudinal effect.

Whilst referral to a sport psychologist was higher pre-module, this is most likely due to the timepre. The pre-question related to whether they had referred an athlete to a sport psychologist ever (and thus could span a period of many years), whilst the post-question related to whether any referrals had been made since studying the module (and thus only referred to the period during which the participant undertook the module). There is some support for the finding in the data and in the increasing trend seen in the PIUS to POST3 stages (which is more marked for the psychology group).

Perceptions of the module were also positive with the vast majority of participants giving the module a score of 7 or above, and motivations to undertake any further study, either formal or informal, being relatively high. The fact that the score was maintained during the 6 months following the completion of the module indicates a positive longitudinal effect.

Overall the findings suggest that sport psychology education is a benefit to physiotherapists and indicate that sport psychology CPD courses should be more widely available to practicing physiotherapists.

References


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Caroline Heaney

The Open University, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA

Email: caroline.heaney@open.ac.uk / Tel: 01908-653703

Caroline Heaney

The Open University, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA

Email: caroline.heaney@open.ac.uk / Tel: 01908-653703