

ABSTRACT

THESIS: Assessment of the Sports Nutrition Knowledge, Attitudes and Beliefs of Coaches and Athletic Trainers at a Division I University and Their Perceived Impact of a Certified Sports Specialist in Dietetics to an Athletic Team

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PAGES: 102

Proper nutrition can improve performance and recovery and is essential to all elite athletic performances. As the relationship between sports nutrition and athletic performance and recovery continues to be established, many collegiate athletes are turning to their coaches and athletic trainers for dietary advice. As such it is important to know the current levels of knowledge and receptiveness of the coaching and athletic training staff to nutrition concepts and to understand their perceptions of a certified sports specialist in dietetics (CSSD) as a member of the athletic staff. Thus, the purpose of this study was to identify the sports nutrition knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and recommendations of Division I university coaches and athletic trainers and to identify their perceived use of a CSSD as a member of the athletic team. Coaches and athletic trainers (n=65) of a Midwestern Division I University were emailed an online survey that included: 1) sports nutrition knowledge (SNK); 2) sources of sports nutrition information; 3) beliefs about who is qualified to give nutrition information to athletes; and 4) perceptions of the impact of a CSSD to an athletic team. Of the 65 possible participants, 27 coaches and 9 athletic trainers responded (n=36; 55%). Overall, the mean SNK score was 61.5%±23.4%; athletic trainers (73.0%±10.4%) scored significantly higher than coaches (57.6%±14.2%) (p=0.005).

Athletic trainers were identified as the primary source of SNK (80.6%) for both coaches and athletic trainers, followed by strength and conditioning specialists (69.4%), the internet (66.7%), and CSSDs (58.3%). The most frequent recommendations given to athletes related to hydration (n=29) and nutrition timing (n=21). Only 6 participants (16.7%) did not make nutrition recommendations. Despite rating the benefit of a CSSD to an athletic team as 8.9 ± 1.8 on a 10-point scale, only half (n=18) knew a part-time CSSD was recently employed by the university. Coaches and athletic trainers clearly recognized the value of a CSSD. Although athletic trainers have a basic SNK, the CSSD should be the primary source of nutrition education for athletes.