

Exercise Physiologist perceptions of work setting, professional status and career pathways.

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Background: As a new Allied Health Profession (AHP) working in Health settings the Exercise Physiology (EP) workforce is faced with small profession numbers, current levels of experience and length of career, governance, leadership, professional linkages and system based issues. These factors may impact on the nature of work and ultimately job satisfaction and career opportunity over time. This research project was undertaken to identify the current (2014) perceptions of 11 of the 14 EP's Exercise Physiologists working within the South Australian Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA).

Methods: A 1:1 interview approach was undertaken using a standardised set of questions to unfold the dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee. Interviews were informal and topics covered; EP role definition, work specificity and focus, perceptions and understanding by others of the work of an EP, work within a multi-disciplinary team, perceived and real barriers, the work environment and conflict, inter professional communication, workplace support including mentoring, feedback and evaluation, the image and awareness of EP, availability of EP-specific professional development opportunities and influencing University training of EPs

Results: SA DoHA EP's work in a variety of settings, usually singularly within a multi-disciplinary team and most often without direct line EP support or supervision. Perceived barriers include workload issues such as paperwork, staff shortages, increasingly complex and medically unstable clients, and lack of appropriate equipment.

Conclusion: If these perceptions represent the reality of EP's working in Health systems there is a need for both systems and professional organisations to address the current issues of concern which include; inter-professional status, increasing health complexity of clients including the prevalence of mental health issues, changes to Health systems and most importantly job satisfaction and security.