AUTONOMY AND PRODUCTIVITY AMONG PHYSICAL THERAPISTS LICENSED IN NORTH DAKOTA: A SURVEY AND ANALYSIS

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Purpose: Autonomy has been found to have a positive correlation with job satisfaction and a negative correlation with burnout. Although previous studies have focused on the autonomy of other healthcare providers, no study has researched autonomy or productivity requirements among physical therapists (PTs). The purpose of this study was to assess the level of autonomy and productivity among PTs; and to analyze the relationships between autonomy, productivity, and subject demographic factors.

Descriptions: A link to an online survey was emailed to 714 licensed PTs in North Dakota. 297 surveys were returned for a response rate of 41.6%. Subjects completed a survey consisting of demographic information, productivity requirements, and the Work Autonomy Scale (WAS). The WAS, consists of 9 questions and assesses Method Autonomy, the freedom regarding how one goes about their work; Scheduling Autonomy, the freedom one has regarding scheduling their work; and Criteria Autonomy, the freedom over how one’s work performance is evaluated. T-tests and Pearson Correlations were used to determine significance between variables.

Observations: 52.2% of subjects reported having a productivity requirement. Subjects had higher levels of method and schedule autonomy, and lower levels of criteria autonomy. No significant differences in autonomy were found in regard to sex. Subjects who were APTA members and who had been a clinical instructor in the past year had significantly higher levels of criteria autonomy. Subjects with a productivity requirement had significantly lower levels for all three autonomy constructs. There was no significant correlation between autonomy levels and age, hours worked per week, or years of experience. The presentation will also include percentages of some form of agreement for each WAS question.

Conclusions: PTs have relatively higher levels of autonomy regarding how they go about and schedule their work compared to autonomy regarding how they are evaluated. PTAs who were clinical instructors and APTA members had higher levels of autonomy regarding how they go about how they are evaluated. PTs with a productivity requirement had significantly lower perceived levels of autonomy regarding their job.

Implications: As autonomy has been shown to increase job satisfaction and decrease occupational burnout rates, it is important for facilities with productivity requirements for PTs to be aware that high productivity levels may lower some aspects of autonomy.