

Physiotherapy students & mentally and physically impaired athletes

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Background and purpose

To be successful as an athlete at major tournaments, targeted preparation is necessary. Sport-specific strength and endurance training, injury prevention as well as regeneration measures and relaxation techniques are essential elements of successful preparation, regardless of a person's physical condition.

In their education, student physiotherapists only practise functional examinations on each other. Practical work with patients is only carried out during internships. Working with mentally and physically handicapped athletes allows students to apply what they have learned directly to people who often have anomalies in their constitution and condition, and prepares them for their placements in the best possible way.

In the academic year 2021/2022, physiotherapy students at the University of Applied Sciences Burgenland worked together with athletes in various courses to prepare them as well as possible for the 8th National Special Olympics. The students were able to apply what they have learned in supervised physiotherapy sessions. The athletes received an individual package of measures and physiotherapeutic care during the preparation and tournament period.



Fig. 1: Regeneration measures at the National Special Olympics. Credit: FH Burgenland 2022

Research question and description

- What is the added value for the students of working with physically and mentally impaired athletes in terms of empathy, inclusion and therapeutic action?

As part of the courses (Fig. 2), the students identified the main problems of the athletes through functional assessments. Adapted exercises were then developed and sent home as a training programme to optimise and support the athletes' preparation for the competition.

In June 2022, the Summer Games were held place in the southern province of Burgenland. During the games, regeneration measures and massage were offered to all participating athletes (Fig. 1+3).

A joint closing ceremony was held in September 2022. A floorball tournament was organised with the supported athletes.

Despite the end of the project, the cooperation remains sustainable. In the future, the athletes will continue to be supported by the students in their respective courses.



Fig. 2: Group picture at the practical lessons, Credit: FH Burgenland 2022

Results

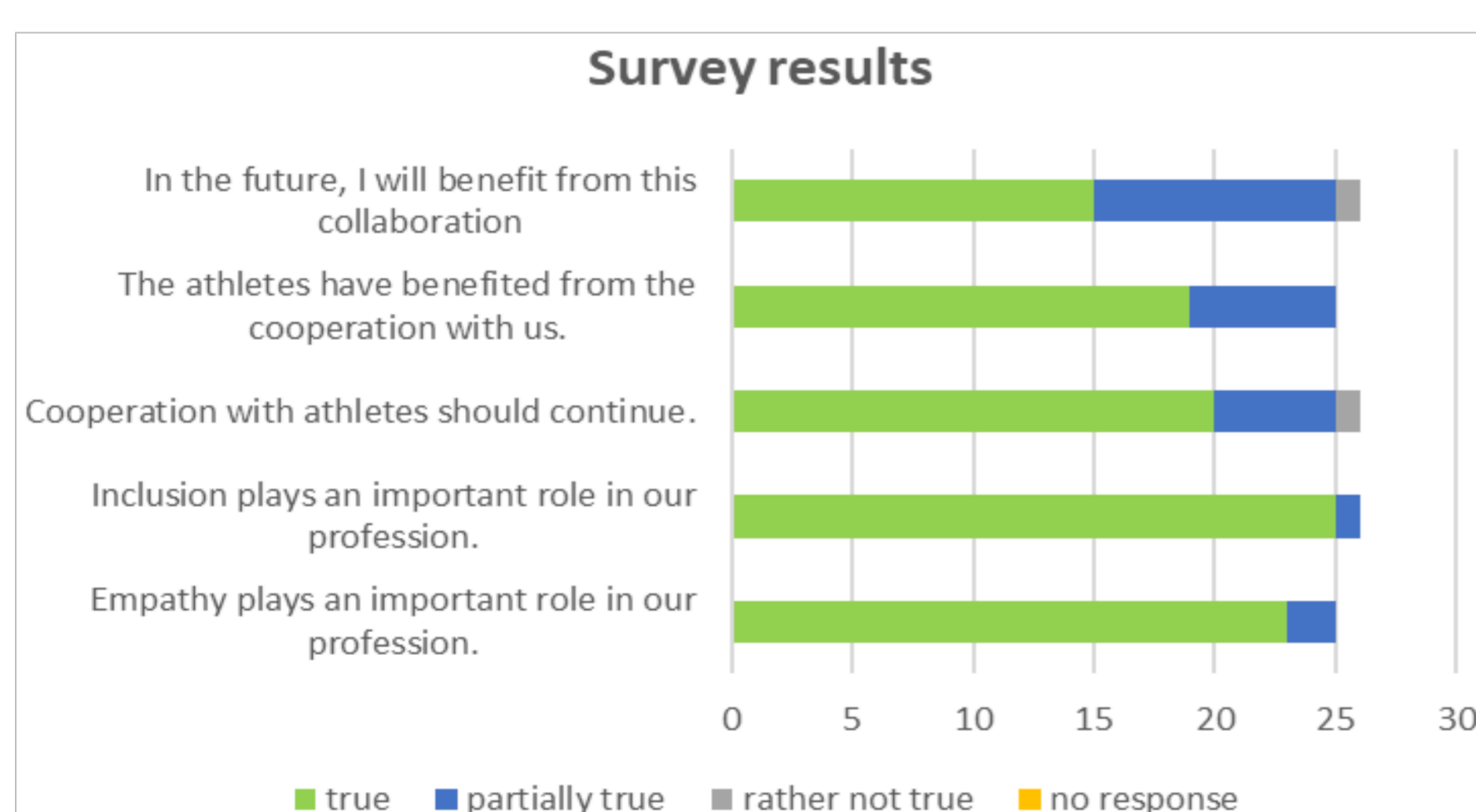


Fig. 4: Survey results by importance



Fig. 5: Survey results after profit

The feedback and the benefit of the collaboration were evaluated to the students by means of questionnaire survey. Of the 49 questionnaires sent out, 26 were completed and used for evaluation. The questionnaire contained questions about the courses in which the athletes were examined or treated and about the events that were attended together in the course of the project. The main focus of the questions was the personal and professional benefit that could be drawn from the respective courses. 90% of the students stated that they had benefited from the application of physiotherapeutic examination and treatment techniques to the athletes (Fig. 5). Another questions concerned the evaluation of the overall project. Here, the importance of inclusion and empathy in the profession of physiotherapy, as well as the cooperation with the athletes was emphasized positively throughout (Fig. 4).



Fig. 3: Collaboration on the „Healthy Road“ during the Special Olympics Games in Burgenland 2022. Credit: FH Burgenland

References

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Conclusion

- ✓ An important quality for successful therapeutic treatment is empathy.
- ✓ Early and frequent contact with physically and mentally impaired athletes can strengthen and practice these skills at an early stage.
- ✓ In addition, newly learnt techniques and physiotherapeutic skills can be directly applied, thus improving preparation for future placements.