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Gaining an Edge

Upon receipt of each monthly issue of the JOSPT, there is much anticipation of the new information and potential knowledge it contains. When I reflect on the evolution of our profession, I am reminded of the enormous scientific and technical advances that have taken place within the field of sports medicine. Through this new information, a seed of knowledge is planted, but it is up to each individual to cultivate and nurture this information into a clinical advantage for his or her patients.

In his American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine (AOSSM) presidential address, Dr. Frank Bassett challenged all of us to gain a competitive edge. Patients come to us looking to gain an edge on their specific problems. This is an everyday concept in the field of sports; athletes are constantly looking for any advantage that can help them to survive the next training session or to win the next race or game.

Like the athletes we treat, physical therapists are also competitors. We constantly compete against sprained ankles, torn ligaments, and strained muscles. We also compete against each other to develop new and better techniques. This type of competition is healthy, provided that its purpose is to make ourselves better and more skilled, thereby improving the care of our patients. After all, it is the health of our patients that stimulates us to desire an edge in the first place.

What is the prize and reward for having a competitive advantage? In physical therapy, the prize should be a successful rehabilitation outcome, and the winner should be the patient. How do we achieve a competitive advantage? Some people choose to use business skills to self proclaim their clinical expertise; others choose to advertise. In our profession, I believe that the best form of advertising is still word of mouth. Let your praise come out of the mouth of another.

What are the mouths saying these days? How are we as clinicians perceived? Remember that perception is reality, and this perception depends upon where you are looking, what you are looking for, and who is doing the looking. Many people perceive that the outlook for our profession is bleak because of impending health care reform and governmental regulation. The same individuals believe that these changes are beyond our control. On the contrary, I believe that the real danger lies within us, especially if we sit back and do nothing. Our challenge is to overcome these feelings of helplessness and to realize that how we are perceived and the direction of physical therapy lie directly *within* our control.

What fair competitive advantage should we strive to achieve? Gaining an edge will require hard work, competence, and honest service to all of our patients. We can all change perception and achieve a competitive edge by constantly upgrading our skills and keeping pace with new techniques and the other scientific and clinical research. Think about the word KNOWLEDGE—gaining an edge from what you know. Knowledge is power, and this is the competitive advantage that I hope we all strive to achieve. With increased knowledge, we can continue to upgrade the level of students entering the field; heighten awareness of integrity and service as the heart and soul of our profession; and convince regulators, lawmakers, and others that our mission is service.

As you read these pages, strive to gain a competitive edge. Plant the seed, nurture the information into your own clinical advantage, and we'll be one up on the competition.

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