Telecommuting as the Director of Clinical Education (DCE) in a Doctoral Physical Therapy Program.

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Unique & Innovative

• The concept of telecommuting as a faculty member is novel.
• It could help reduce the current faculty shortage issue in the Physical Therapy Education setting.

Purpose

• CAPTE reported 103 Core Faculty vacancies in the academic year 2010-11.
• CAPTE reported 132 Core Faculty vacancies in the academic year 2011-12.
• This case report was written to help determine the feasibility of allowing the Director of Clinical Education to telecommute from Florida to Maine as a unique way to retain a valued core faculty member of the DPT department.

Description

• In November 2009, the DCE moved from Maine to Florida.
• The DCE and Program Director discussed options that would allow the DCE to retain her current position.
• They determined it might be feasible to perform this job remotely. It was established that this arrangement would occur for 1 year as a trail.
• After 1 year, they evaluated how effectively things were working from the students', clinical education faculty's, and department's perspectives.
• It was determined that no stakeholder's felt the change impacted the completion of all of the job tasks the DCE was responsible for completing.
• There were even unexpected positive aspects that resulted from this new process.
  * Increased contacts for creating new clinical sites in the southeastern part of the US.
  * Increased ability to do site visits for clinical sites in the southeastern part of the US.
• This non-traditional faculty work arrangement is now permanent.

Observation

Key Points Summary
1. All stakeholders evaluated the DCE yearly and reported no significant concerns with regards to her job performance.
2. The program director’s yearly performance appraisal of the DCE said that this role did not impede her ability to perform her job requirements.

Clinical Education Faculty Feedback
• Annually the Clinical Education Faculty (CIs & CCCEs) evaluated the DCE. Comments from the evaluations since 2009 supported Key Point #1.
  ***“She was organized and had a strong understanding of each student and their level of proficiency”
  **“She was always available to reach during the student clinical affiliation”
  **“Good, prompt communication, well organized”

Student Feedback
• The students evaluated the DCE after each clinical practicum. The evaluation ask if “The DCE was supportive throughout the clinical experience”.
  **Since 2009 the average rating of the DCE was 4.5/5.0 (range from 4.3 to 4.7)

Conclusion

Benefits
• It would benefit PT programs (as well as other types) to consider alternative working options for their core faculty in order to decrease the turnover of quality faculty at their school.
• By decreasing the faculty turnover, it would:
  * Reduce the stress to the department and other faculty when there is a vacancy.
  * Decrease the cost associated with searching for and hiring a new faculty member.
  * Provide the students with consistency with regards to the teaching and advising they receive from the core faculty.

Additional Thoughts
• Future work could be the trial for this type of a work arrangement with other core faculty.
• Due to the nature of the job as a DCE, it may be easier for this core faculty member to work remotely than other core faculty.

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