

# **American Exercise and Fitness Professional Association Inc. (AEFPA)**

## **2015 - Position Statement**

### **Status of the Industry**

Decades of scientific data have clearly shown the benefits of balanced nutrition and regular exercise for the universal and targeted prevention of many chronic diseases, athletic performance enhancement, pain management, weight loss and the improvement of activities for daily living. We know that exercise, activity and proper nutrition are beneficial and good for us. There is ample research that suggests that exercise is beneficial in reducing the risk of coronary artery disease, stroke and some forms of cancer. Exercise is helpful in addressing obesity and managing Type II Diabetes. Additionally exercise has been shown to help control blood pressure and blood lipid levels. In recent years being sedentary has been included as a risk factor for heart disease and stroke. Some experts suggest that being sedentary is as detrimental to overall health as is smoking cigarettes. As Exercise and Fitness Professionals we play an active role in the prevention of many chronic diseases. This preventative approach to managing health has been shown to result in an overall decrease in healthcare costs.

Clearly being an Exercise and Fitness Professional goes beyond working with special populations. Our clientele is diverse, many of whom are apparently healthy and have goals related to athletic performance, feeling better, stress management and physique transformation. Because of the diversity of our clients it is imperative for Exercise and Fitness Professionals to be adequately educated and trained prior to initiating a career in the field. A solid foundation of knowledge will increase the likelihood of long and successful careers in the fitness industry. Properly educated and successful Exercise and Fitness Professionals will continue to have a positive and profound impact in the lives of both individuals and the community. Properly educated Exercise and Fitness Professionals are also less likely to design and implement ineffective or unsafe programs for their clientele.

As our base of knowledge has continued to grow, we've also experienced simultaneous growth of the fitness industry. Despite this growth in both our understanding of the exercise sciences and the fitness industry, the prevalence of the chronic diseases that exercise has been shown to benefit has continued to escalate. There is a disconnection. To address this, it is the position of the AEFPA that it is time for the exercise and fitness professions to organize and move forward in a new and different direction.

A major source of growth in the multi-billion dollar fitness industry has been the use of personal fitness trainers in health clubs and in private studios. While the fitness industry has flourished financially from this growth, the Exercise and Fitness Professional has not. In 2012 (Bureau of Labor Statistics) the median annual income for fitness instructors was \$31,720. According to the US Census Bureau, the median income for all wage earners in 2012 was \$26,989. As a profession we are doing slightly better than average but there is a caveat – the US Census average covers all wage earners age 15 and older including social security recipients and

part-time employment. In addition, it doesn't consider other forms of income beyond earned wages and the US Census data admittedly typically underestimates income. Despite the specific values related to the median income statistics we clearly are, as Exercise and Fitness Professionals, in the same income range as the national average wage earner. Because of the importance and value that quality fitness instruction provides for individuals and society in general, it is the position and goal of AEFPA to work to increase wages and career opportunities for Exercise and Fitness Professionals.

One reason for less than adequate compensation for Exercise and Fitness Professionals is that there are too many practicing professionals per capita. In 2012, there were 267,000 people employed as Fitness Instructors (Bureau of Labor Statistics). According to IHRSA, 6.4 million people worked with a Personal Trainer in 2012; that computes to an average of slightly less than 24 clients per trainer per year - 24 total clients trained during the course of an entire year per trainer. Obviously most clients attend multiple sessions when working with a trainer. But because of natural attrition, the number of clients on a trainer's clientele list could be considerably below 24 clients at any given time during the year. With a steady clientele of 24 clients (each training one or more times each week), a Personal Trainer would average much more than the median annual income of \$31,720. Additionally the majority of Exercise and Fitness Professionals do not receive additional benefits from employers. According to IDEA, only 38% of Personal Trainers are eligible for additional benefits. Not only is the average income only \$31,720, but 62% of Exercise and Fitness Professionals earning that have no other employment benefits.

It is the position of AEFPA that compensation and career opportunities for Exercise and Fitness Professionals cannot improve as long as there are too many fitness professionals per capita. Therefore, a goal of AEFPA is to actively increase the market and demand for Exercise and Fitness Professionals.

What type of problems does the current status of our industry present?

### **The Problem**

It is the position of AEFPA that there are three primary issues facing Exercise and Fitness Professionals that, when resolved, will result in better career opportunities, work environments and compensation.

The first of those issues: there are currently too many entities providing credentials to fitness professionals. The second: the standard to acquire credentials doesn't properly prepare aspiring fitness professionals; this results in a substandard level of instruction. And third: because of the ease of acquiring exercise and fitness credentials, there are far too many exercise and fitness professionals per capita.

Without an established educational standard in the exercise and fitness profession, each independent certifying organization is free to determine what information is deemed essential for their specific examination; this results in a highly fragmented industry. While some credentials require a deep understanding of the exercise sciences and are difficult to acquire, many others don't and can be acquired quickly and easily. This results in a very divergent knowledge base within a group of people who all identify themselves as Exercise or Fitness Professionals. Some of these professionals are well trained and competent, some are not and both employers and clientele have difficulty distinguishing between the two. Therefore, there is currently little incentive for any Exercise or Fitness Professional to seek additional credentials other than to further their own knowledge. Employers and clientele treat Exercise and Fitness Professionals who have minimal credentials in very much the same manner as they do highly qualified professionals.

Each certifying organization attempts to convince young and aspiring Exercise and Fitness Professionals that its organization is the answer to a successful career in the exercise and fitness industry. The problem is that each organization's existence depends in large part on the revenue it generates from the certification process; therefore the certification exams can't be too difficult to pass. When someone who's interested in a career in exercise and fitness sits for a certification exam, their time and money spent studying is done with the goal of becoming certified; so the criteria for passing and certification in many cases is very low. The problem is that it is too easy to earn credentials and enter the field. This results in far too many fitness professionals with minimal education and experience who deliver a sub-standard level of service to their clientele.

It's common for the minimally educated and inexperienced Exercise and Fitness Professional to be offered the same compensation plan as someone who is maximally credentialed and experienced. When an inadequately trained Exercise and Fitness Professional offers inappropriate or unsafe instruction and program design - like it or not - this negatively reflects on the entire profession. Those who aren't properly prepared for successful exercise and fitness careers pull the compensation and status level of the profession down to the lowest levels. We must hold ourselves to a higher standard before we can expect adequate compensation from employers and enhanced prestige and improved professional status from both employers and the market (clients).

## **The Solution**

Having reviewed the status of the fitness and exercise industry and the subsequent problems that result from that status, one question remains: What to do about it?

AEFPA's solution is multi-dimensional. **First**, we must organize as a profession. **Second**, we must establish educational standards for entry into the profession - a unified code of ethics and scope of practice. **Third**, we must acquire licensure for the profession. **Fourth**, we must start delivering an enhanced level of exercise and fitness instruction. **Fifth**, we must work with

employment partners to increase industry compensation packages. And **sixth**, we must launch a public relations campaign to let the general public know what the new industry standards are and what to expect when working with a qualified Exercise and Fitness Professional. The purpose of the public relations campaign is to increase the perceived value of working with an Exercise and Fitness Professional and increasing the size of the exercise and fitness market.

Organizing as a profession is the first step. The Exercise and Fitness Profession is a noble one - worthy of respect, prestige and adequate compensation. The work we do and the ways in which we positively impact the lives of the people we work with make this true. Although the current educational requirements that we propose are not as stringent as they are in many of the other Allied Health Professions, we can certainly look to other professions for guidance on how to advance our own. A major difference between our profession and Doctors (American Medical Association), Nurses (American Nurses Association), Physical Therapists and Dentists (American Physical Therapy Association and American Dental Association) is that they have organized and we have not. All other professionals have more prestige and respect in the community and are better compensated than we are because they have organized and established standards for their own profession and we haven't. The time has come for us to organize and determine for ourselves what the future of our profession will be. There is strength in numbers. The solution is clear.

One of the first priorities of AEFPA is to determine for ourselves the educational standards that will be required prior to entry into the profession. Additionally, we want to establish a singular Code of Ethics and Scope of Practice. From this Position Statement, AEFPA's position is that a Bachelor's Degree in an Exercise Science-related subject, clinical hours in a designated fitness learning facility and successful completion of a standardized examination (with both a practical and written component) should be the minimal requirements. The number of clinical hours as well as examination content will be determined by industry leaders who will work together on AEFPA advisory panels and committees. Those panel and committee members will consult closely with AEFPA members to determine what the necessary knowledge requirements are for success in our industry. Once the educational, clinical and examination requirements are completed, it is AEFPA's position that all Exercise and Fitness Professionals must obtain licensure.

Licensure of Exercise and Fitness Professionals has been a contentious issue, most likely because it is misunderstood. The primary argument against licensure is that it is a restrictive government control over an industry. The truth is that licensure is really self-regulation of an industry and its process of credentialing and maintaining professional standards. Yes, each state has a medical board and the members of the board are most likely appointed by the Governor of that state. Most of that board is comprised of medical Doctors (it is common practice for all boards to have at least one member from outside the profession) who are active in AMA. The AMA works to influence whom each Governor appoints so that they control their own profession. Governors do not have the time to research board members so they usually acquiesce to the recommendations of influential associations. State legislatures are not

determining the questions on the medical board exams or professional standards for Doctors, Doctors are. While there are certainly some complex and controversial issues with medical care and our government, the process by which Doctors are credentialed and their need to maintain professionalism isn't among them. We can follow their precedent and example by standardizing our own profession's credentials.

Once higher education requirement standards are established and individuals go through that process, a higher level of exercise and fitness instruction will follow. If Exercise and Fitness Professionals are delivering a higher level of service they will deserve better compensation. We will work with employers in the industry to help them to better understand the benefit and value of a higher quality of fitness instruction. We will also work toward improved compensation for the exercise and fitness professional who are delivering this higher quality instruction. When the Exercise and Fitness Professional of the future will be required to complete a more stringent educational process, it is fair to expect that that individual should receive adequate compensation for the service that he/she provides. AEFPA's primary desired outcome is for Exercise and Fitness Professionals to make more money and have a higher standard of living throughout their careers.

To assist in the goal of improved compensation for Exercise and Fitness Professionals, AEFPA will embark on a public relations campaign. This PR campaign will be fluid and occur throughout the entire process of establishing these new industry standards. The PR campaign will educate consumers (potential clients) on the newly established standards and it will help to clarify the difference between a properly credentialed and improperly credentialed professional. The PR campaign will also emphasize to the public that there are potential risks in not choosing a properly educated and credentialed Exercise or Fitness Professional. The goal of the PR campaign will be to increase demand for newly credentialed professionals so that employers are faced with little option but to hire only those properly trained and certified. Equally important, we also want the campaign to help the general public understand the benefits of choosing to work with Exercise and Fitness Professionals, resulting in an increased market share - more demand will also mean better compensation.

AEFPA supports the many changes that must occur to enhance and advance the careers of Exercise and Fitness Professionals. At the core of those changes is increased educational requirements and licensure. AEFPA's official position is that no Exercise or Fitness Professional currently working in the industry will lose his/her job or be unable to continue working in the industry. AEFPA supports the grandfathering of Exercise and Fitness Professionals who met previous industry criteria to maintain their status. AEFPA is open to the possibility of a graduated process of implementing the new standards over a pre-determined period of time. Those individuals who enter the field during this time of transition may be required to engage in a continued educational process to eventually meet the new standards. However, AEFPA members who are grandfathered in prior to the establishment of the new standards will be highly encouraged to meet the new standards on their own timetable.

## **How Does the AEFPA Differ from a Fitness Certification Organization?**

First and most importantly, AEFPA has no intention of ever offering a Fitness Certification.

AEFPA is an incorporated non-profit trade organization by the state of Arizona. It is a 501(C) (6) non-profit, which is an IRS designation specifically for trade organizations. Ultimately the sole purpose of AEFPA is to enhance and advance the Exercise and Fitness professions. This will be accomplished by building a robust membership and active participation from AEFPA members.

## **The Structure of the AEFPA**

The AEFPA plans to organize a national panel of exercise, fitness, industrial and business experts to establish the standards for the exercise and fitness industry. The national panel will be a resource for state panels and boards to work on establishing standards state by state. The hope is that the state boards will work closely enough with the national panels so that most if not all states will have reciprocity with newly credentialed exercise and fitness professionals. This is important because it will provide greater flexibility within the industry for relocation as it becomes necessary. Additionally, expert committees will be formed with a more focused agenda to support the work of the national panel. Those committees will include (but not be limited to): Medicine, Examination and Assessment, Fitness Professionals, Health Clubs, Public Relations and Academia.