



Improving Veterans' Health through Exercise and Adaptive Sports

Brittany Hardin¹, Robin Parish, DHA, MA, OTR/L, CHT² and DeVonda Elliott, PsyD., CTRS/LRT, CDP²
University of Mississippi Medical Center¹ and G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VA Medical Center (VAMC)²



OVERVIEW OF CAPSTONE SITE

G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VAMC is located in Jackson, MS, and is dedicated to serving veterans who selflessly served our country who now live with physical limitations and psychosocial deficits. Recreation therapy (RT) offers adaptive sports and exercise as an alternate route for veterans to maintain a healthy lifestyle and enhance their quality of life. The purpose of the capstone project was to provide in-depth knowledge and research to improve the opportunity for veterans to become involved with the RT Adaptive Sports Program.

LITERATURE SUMMARY

One unique opportunity for health and healing offered at the G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VA Medical Center is through adaptive sports. Adaptive sports are played by individuals with varying disabilities and include a range of activities and levels of playing. To be qualified as an adaptive sport, a sport or recreational activity is modified to accommodate disabilities and ability levels. However, the modifications are made in such a way that protects the integrity of the original sport or recreational activity. The use of adaptive sports as an aid to rehabilitation for individuals with disabilities dates back to the 1700s and has only flourished since. Individuals who choose to participate, if able, can even reach the Paralympic Games." (Lee & Uihlein, 2019; Scholz & Chen, 2017)
The use of adaptive sports as an aid in rehabilitation aims to optimize Veteran's independence, community engagement, well-being and quality of life (National Veterans Sports Programs & Special Events, n.d.). In a study that aimed to investigate the effects of sports participation on the service members' and veterans' self-esteem and quality of life, Laferrier, Teodorski, & Cooper (2015) found a positive relationship between participants' quality of life and the number of years spent participating in sports, exercise, and recreation since the onset of their disability. The results of this study suggest that participation in sports can have a positive effect on the overall well-being of those participating.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Capstone student conducted a semi-structured interview in-person with capstone mentor and OT student coordinator prior to arriving at capstone site.

Needs identified during **phase I**: Policies and Procedures Manual for the Adaptive Sports Program to provide organized, in-depth qualifications and guidelines for staff and veterans associated with the program.

Phase II needs assessment consisted of informal conversation with capstone mentor, veterans and other healthcare providers, as well as a formal interview with veteran participating in adaptive sports at a national level.

Needs identified during phase II: Quality Improvement Plan for targeted program outcomes for the Adaptive Sports Program to include increased knowledge and advertisement of the adaptive sports and exercise opportunities, which will lead to increased participation in the programs.

PROJECT GOALS / OBJECTIVES

Goal 1: Student will develop a targeted program improvement plan for the adaptive sports program by the end of week 13.

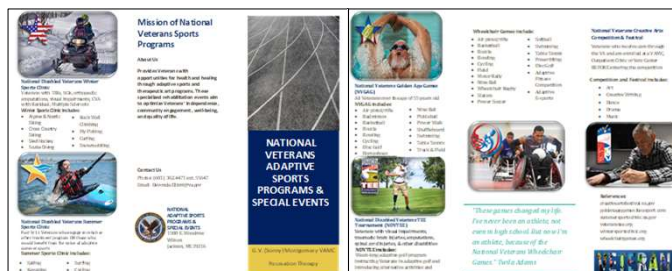
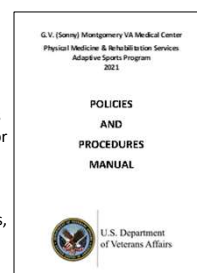
Goal 2: Student will propose the Bid Packet to host the National Veterans Golden Age Games in year 2024 or 2026.

Goal 3: Student will develop a policy and procedure manual for the adaptive sports program at the VA by the end of the 14-week capstone experience.

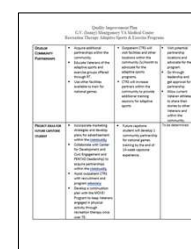
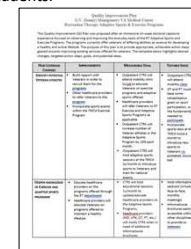
PROJECT DEVELOPMENT and/or IMPLEMENTATION

Phase I needs assessment concluded the need for more organization, standards, and guidelines for staff and veterans associated with the Adaptive Sports Program. This led to the creation of the Recreation Therapy Adaptive Sports Program Policies and Procedures Manual. Capstone student researched other manuals, continuously observed standards and guidelines needed for the program, and collaborated with capstone mentor to develop the manual. Included within the manual, but not limited to, are roles and responsibilities of Recreation Therapy staff, veterans, other healthcare providers associated with the Adaptive Sports Program, code of conduct, policies, agreements, procedures, informational letters, participation log, adaptive sports, exercise and mobility checklist, and quarterly program evaluation template.

An overarching theme found throughout phase II needs assessment and the 14-week immersive capstone experience, was the lack of knowledge and advertisement available regarding the opportunities for veterans to get involved with adaptive sports and exercise. Capstone student created two educational brochures to display throughout the VAMC, as well as provide to the healthcare providers to bring awareness of the adaptive sports and exercise opportunities. It is the capstone student's hope that these brochures will be dispersed to veterans through healthcare provider appointments. See below brochures of the National Veterans Events offered, as well as the YMCA Exercise Program brochure.



Last, but not least, capstone student created a Quality Improvement (QI) plan for the Recreation Therapy Adaptive Sports Program through the lens of the PDSA Model. The PDSA Model was used as a guide to organize a continuous plan for implementing small, incremental changes and evaluating the outcomes. The QI plan contains targeted improvements, S.M.A.R.T. goals, testable ideas, and suggestions for implications for future capstone students.



PLAN FOR PROJECT EVALUATION

Since the manual and QI plan was not completed until the end of the capstone experience, the capstone project was not implemented and was not in effect yet. Capstone student was unable to evaluate the project effectiveness. However, capstone student created a project/program evaluation tool and provided to the recreational therapy supervisor with an e-calendar reminder to complete survey every 3 months on the Adaptive Sports Program and Exercise Program. This survey was created to monitor improvements and ensure that goals are being met within the QI Plan to enable the programs to remain on an uphill climb.

PROJECT SUMMARY AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

The capstone experience and development of the capstone project supplied capstone student with specialized skills within non-traditional occupational therapy roles. Capstone student gained experience incorporating occupational therapy into adaptive sports and exercise.

It is the capstone students hope that future students will use the tools provided and continue to enhance the RT Adaptive Sports and Exercise Programs through community partnerships, marketing and advocacy plans, and recruitment plans to meet the needs of the heroes of our country through adaptive sports and exercise.

REFERENCES AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

Special thank you to those who supported me and guided me along this journey: Dr. Elliott, Dr. Parish, Dr. Rogers, and the rest of the OT faculty