

Athletic Trainer

Athletic training is practiced by athletic trainers (ATs), health care professionals who collaborate with physicians to optimize activity and participation of patients and clients. Athletic training encompasses the prevention, diagnosis, and intervention of emergency, acute, and chronic medical conditions involving impairment, functional limitations, and disabilities.

History

Work on establishing standards for athletic training educational programs was initiated in 1959 by the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA), with the first two programs approved in 1969. By 1979, there were 23 undergraduate programs and two graduate programs approved by NATA. By 1997, NATA had approved 87 entry-level and 13 graduate athletic training educational programs.

In 1989, NATA applied to the AMA Council on Medical Education (CME) for recognition of athletic training as an allied health occupation; recognition was granted in 1990. Also in 1990, an initial meeting was conducted to develop the Standards (Essentials) for accreditation of educational programs for athletic trainers; standards were subsequently adopted in 1991.

Following the separation of the AMA from the Committee on Allied Health Education and Accreditation (CAHEA), the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) was formed, with the Joint Review Committee for Athletic Training functioning as a Commission on Accreditation of that group. On July 1, 2006, the JRC-AT separated from CAAHEP and became the independent accreditor CAATE (Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education). At this time, all CAAHEP-accredited athletic training education programs became CAATE-accredited.

Career Description

Past role delineation studies have concluded that the role of an athletic trainer includes, but is not limited to:

- Prevention, which includes:
 - " Educating the appropriate patient(s) about risks associated with participation and specific activities using effective communication techniques to minimize the risk of injury and illness
 - " Interpreting pre-participation and other relevant screening information in accordance with accepted guidelines to minimize the risk of injury and illness
 - " Instructing the appropriate patient(s), using effective communication techniques, about standard protective equipment to minimize the risk of injury and illness
 - " Applying appropriate prophylactic/protective measures using commercial products or custom-made devices to minimize the risk of injury and illness
 - " Identifying safety hazards associated with activities, activity areas, and equipment by following accepted procedures and guidelines in order to make appropriate recommendations and to minimize the risk of injury and illness
 - " Maintaining clinical and treatment areas by complying with safety and sanitation standards to minimize the risk of injury and illness
 - " Monitoring participants and environmental conditions by following accepted guidelines to promote safe participation
 - " Facilitating physical conditioning by designing and implementing appropriate programs to minimize the risk of injury and illness
 - " Facilitating healthy lifestyle behaviors using effective education, communication, and interventions to reduce the risk of injury and illness and promote wellness
- Clinical evaluation and diagnosis, which includes:
 - " Obtaining a history through observation, interview, and/or review of relevant records to assess current or potential injury, illness, or condition
 - " Inspecting the involved area(s) visually to assess the injury, illness, or health-related condition
 - " Palpating the involved area(s) using standard techniques to assess the injury, illness, or health-related condition
 - " Performing specific tests in accordance with accepted procedures to assess the injury, illness, or health-related condition
 - " Formulating a clinical impression by interpreting the signs, symptoms, and predisposing factors of the injury, illness, or condition to determine the appropriate course of action
 - " Educating the appropriate patient(s) regarding the assessment by communicating information about the current or potential injury, illness, or health-related condition to encourage compliance with recommended care
 - " Sharing assessment findings with other health professionals, using effective means of communication to coordinate appropriate care
- Immediate care, which includes:
 - " Employing life-saving techniques through the use of standard emergency procedures in order to reduce morbidity and the incidence of mortality
 - " Preventing exacerbation of non-life-threatening condition(s) through the use of standard procedures in order to reduce morbidity
 - " Facilitating the timely transfer of care for conditions beyond the scope of practice of the athletic trainer by implementing appropriate referral strategies to stabilize and/or prevent exacerbation of the condition(s)
 - " Directing the appropriate patient(s) in standard immediate care procedures using formal and informal methods to

facilitate immediate care

" Executing the established emergency action plan using effective communication and administrative practices to facilitate efficient immediate care

• Treatment, rehabilitation, and reconditioning, which includes:

" Administering therapeutic and conditioning exercise(s) using standard techniques and procedures to facilitate recovery, function, and/or performance

" Administering therapeutic modalities using standard techniques and procedures to facilitate recovery, function, and/or performance

" Applying braces, splints, or assistive devices in accordance with appropriate standards and practices to facilitate recovery, function, and/or performance

" Administering treatment for general illness and/or conditions using standard techniques and procedures to facilitate recovery, function, and/or performance

" Reassessing the status of injuries, illnesses, and/or conditions using standard techniques and documentation strategies to determine appropriate treatment, rehabilitation, and/or reconditioning and to evaluate readiness to return to a desired level of activity

" Educating the appropriate patient(s) in the treatment, rehabilitation, and reconditioning of injuries, illnesses, and/or conditions using applicable methods and materials to facilitate recovery, function, and/or performance

" Providing guidance and/or counseling for the appropriate patient(s) in the treatment, rehabilitation, and reconditioning of injuries, illnesses, and/or conditions through communication to facilitate recovery, function, and/or performance

• Organization and administration, which includes:

" Establishing action plans for response to injury or illness using available resources to provide the required range of health care services for patients, athletic activities, and events

" Establishing policies and procedures for the delivery of health care services following accepted guidelines to promote safe participation, timely care, and legal compliance

" Establishing policies and procedures for the management of health care facilities and activity areas by referring to accepted guidelines, standards, and regulations to promote safety and legal compliance

" Managing human and fiscal resources by utilizing appropriate leadership, organization, and management techniques to provide efficient and effective health care services

" Maintaining records using an appropriate system to document services rendered, provide for continuity of care, facilitate communication, and meet legal standards

" Developing professional relationships with appropriate patients and entities by applying effective communication techniques to enhance the delivery of healthcare

• Professional responsibility, which includes:

• Demonstrating appropriate professional conduct by complying with applicable standards and maintaining continuing competence to provide quality athletic training services

• Adhering to statutory and regulatory provisions and other legal responsibilities relating to the practice of athletic training by maintaining an understanding of these provisions and responsibilities in order to contribute to the safety and welfare of the public

• Educating appropriate patients and entities about the role and standards of practice of the athletic trainer through informal and formal means to improve the ability of those patients and entities to make informed decisions

Employment Characteristics

Athletic trainers typically provide their services in one or more of the following settings: secondary schools, colleges and universities, professional athletic organizations, physician offices, hospital-based clinics, private sports medicine, rehabilitation and therapy clinics, industrial/occupational commercial facilities, military, and performing arts.

Salary

Entry-level salaries in 2008 averaged \$35,000. The average overall salary is \$45,000, with the upper ranges from \$55,000 to \$85,000.

Data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes299091.htm) from May 2009 show that wages at the 10th percentile are \$25,510, the 50th percentile (median) at \$41,340, and the 90th percentile at \$65,140.

For more information, go to www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary.

Employment Outlook

Employment of athletic trainers is projected by the BLS to grow 37% from 2008 to 2018, much faster than the average for all occupations, because of their role in preventing injuries and reducing healthcare costs. Job growth will be concentrated in the healthcare industry, including hospitals and offices of health practitioners.

Educational Programs

Length. Baccalaureate degree programs require 4 years of study. Postbaccalaureate programs are generally 2 years.

Prerequisites. Applicants for the 4-year baccalaureate degree programs must have a high school diploma or equivalent and meet institutional entrance requirements. Applicants for postbaccalaureate programs should have a baccalaureate degree that includes appropriate course work and clinical experience, as specified by the institution.

Curriculum. The professional curriculum includes formal instruction in:

- Risk management and injury/illness prevention
- Pathology of injury/illness
- Clinical examination and diagnosis
- Acute care of injuries and illnesses
- General medical conditions and disabilities
- Therapeutic modalities
- Therapeutic exercise
- Conditioning and rehabilitative exercise and therapy
- Health care administration
- Psychosocial intervention and referral
- Medical ethics and legal issues
- Pharmacology
- Professional responsibilities

The didactic curriculum is augmented by a series of structured laboratory and clinical experiences.

Licensure, Registration, Certification

Almost all states require that athletic trainers hold the ATC® (Athletic Trainer, Certified) credential, which is issued by the Board of Certification Inc. The ATC credential is supported by three pillars: the BOC certification examination, BOC Standards of Practice and Disciplinary Process, and continuing competence requirements. The computer-based examination verifies that the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for competent performance as an athletic trainer have been met.

At the time of publication, 47 states have some form of athletic training regulation, of which 45 states require the BOC examination in order to obtain regulation. It is important to recognize, however, that passing the BOC examination is only a precursor to athletic training practice. Compliance with state regulatory requirements is mandatory and the only avenue to legal athletic training practice. For specific details regarding state regulation, contact the state regulatory agency.

Inquiries

Careers

National Athletic Trainers' Association, Inc
 2952 Stemmons Freeway, Suite 200
 Dallas, TX 75247
 (214) 637-6282
 (800) TRY-NATA
 (214) 637-2206 Fax
www.nata.org

Certification

Board of Certification, Inc (BOC)
 BOC Administrative Offices
 1415 Haney Street, Suite 200
 Omaha, NE 68102
 (402) 559-0091
 (402) 561-0598 Fax
www.bocatc.org

Program Accreditation

Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE)
 2201 Double Creek Drive, Suite 5006
 Round Rock, TX 78664
 (512) 733-9700
 (512) 733-9701 Fax
 E-mail: caate@sbcglobal.net
www.caate.net

Note: Adapted in part from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, Athletic Trainers, at www.bls.gov/oco/ocos294.htm.