



The FACTS About Certified Athletic Trainers and the National Athletic Trainers' Association

This document corrects misinformation about Certified Athletic Trainers (ATs). It is provided to all people interested in the facts about the athletic training profession in the 21st century. Readers should note that athletic trainers (ATs) work under the direction of physicians. ATs are clinically and academically qualified to medically treat patients and clients of all ages in any physical setting.

1. FACT: All certified athletic trainers have a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university. Athletic trainers are health care professionals similar to physical, occupational, speech language and other therapists.

All certified or licensed athletic trainers **must have a bachelor's or master's degree** from an accredited college or university in order to practice athletic training. Degrees are complementary to accredited athletic training majors and include established academic curricula. Athletic trainers' bachelor's degrees are in pre-medical sciences, kinesiology, exercise physiology, biology, exercise science or physical education. Academic programs are accredited through an independent process by the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE).

2. FACT: The following educational content standards are required for athletic training degree programs. Students must receive formal instruction in the following specific subject matter areas:

Basic and Applied Sciences:

- Human anatomy
- Human physiology
- Chemistry
- Biology
- Physics
- Statistics and research design
- Exercise physiology
- Kinesiology/biomechanics

Professional Content:

- Risk management and injury prevention
- Pathology of injuries and illnesses
- Orthopedic clinical examination and diagnosis
- Medical conditions and disabilities
- Acute care of injuries and illnesses
- Therapeutic modalities
- Conditioning, rehabilitative exercise and referral
- Pharmacology
- Psychosocial intervention and referral
- Nutritional aspects of injuries and illnesses
- Health care administration

3. FACT: Nearly 70 percent of athletic trainers have a master's or doctoral degree.

Certified athletic trainers are highly educated. Nearly 70 percent of ATC credential holders have a master's degree or higher advanced degree. Reflective of the broad base of skills valued by the athletic training profession, these master's degrees may be in athletic training (clinical), education, exercise physiology, counseling, health care administration or health promotion. This great majority of practitioners who hold advance degrees are comparable to other allied health care professionals.

4. FACT: Athletic trainers know and practice the medical arts at the highest professional and ethical standards.

Athletic training is practiced by athletic trainers, 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. Members of the NATA must agree to abide by the Association’s Code of Ethics.

5. FACT: Athletic trainers are regulated and licensed health care workers.

While practice act oversight varies by state, athletic trainers practice under state statutes recognizing them as health care professionals similar to physical therapists, occupational therapists and other health care professionals. Athletic training licensure/regulation exists in 46 states, with aggressive efforts underway to pursue licensure in the remaining states and to update outdated licensure. Athletic trainers practice under the direction of physicians.

6. FACT: An independent national board certifies athletic trainers.

The independent Board of Certification Inc. (BOC) nationally certifies athletic trainers. Athletic trainers must pass an examination and hold an entry-level bachelor’s or master’s degree to become a certified athletic trainer. To retain certification, credential holders must obtain 75 hours of medically related continuing education credits every three years and adhere to Standards of Professional Practice. The BOC is accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies.

7. FACT: Athletic trainers are recognized allied health care professionals.

ATs are highly qualified, multi-skilled allied health care professionals and have been part of the American Medical Association’s Health Professions Career and Education Directory for more than a decade. Athletic trainers are assigned National Provider Identifier (NPI) numbers like all other health care professionals. The taxonomy code for athletic trainers is 2255A2300X. Additionally, the American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics and American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine – among others – are all strong clinical and academic supporters of athletic trainers.

8. FACT: More than 50 percent of NATA’s certified members work outside of school athletic settings and provide services to people of all ages.

Certified athletic trainers work in physician offices as physician extenders. They also work in rural and urban hospitals, hospital emergency rooms, urgent and ambulatory care centers, military hospitals, physical therapy clinics, secondary schools, colleges/universities, youth leagues, commercial settings and professional sports teams. They are in great demand for their versatile health and wellness services. The skills of ATs have been sought and valued by sports medicine specialists and other physicians for more than 50 years. As the U.S. continues its fight against the obesity epidemic, it is important that people have access to health care professionals who can support lifelong, safe physical activity. ATs are an important part of the allied health care workforce, especially as the demand for workers is projected to increase over the next decade.

9. FACT: Athletic trainers have designated CPT/UB Codes.

The American Medical Association (AMA) granted Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) codes for athletic training evaluation and re-evaluation (97005, 97006) in 2000. The codes became effective in 2002. In addition, the American Hospital Association established Uniform Billing (UB) codes – or revenue codes – for athletic training in 1999, effective in 2000.

10. FACT: CPT and UB codes are not provider specific.

The AMA states that the term “provider,” as found in the Physical Medicine section of the CPT code, is a general term used to define the individual performing the service described by the code. According to the AMA, the term “therapist” is not intended to denote any specific practice of specialty field. Physical therapists and/or any other type of therapists are not exclusive providers of general physical medicine examinations, evaluations and interventions. Similar to the athletic training evaluation and re-evaluation codes, other therapists have their own specific evaluation codes.

11. FACT: ATs improve patient functional and physical outcomes.

Results from a nationwide Medical Outcomes Survey demonstrate that care provided by ATs effects a significant change in all outcomes variables measured, with the greatest change in functional outcomes and physical outcomes. The investigation indicates that care provided by ATs generates a change in health-related quality of life patient outcomes. (Ref: Albohm MJ, Wilkerson GB. An outcomes assessment of care provided by certified athletic trainers. *Journal of Rehabilitation Outcomes Measure* 1999; 3 (3):51-56.)

12. FACT: ATs work in rural and medically underserved areas with people of all ages.

ATs are accustomed to working in urgent care environments that have challenging – sometimes even adverse – work and environmental conditions. The athletic training tradition and hands-on clinical and academic education combine to create health care professionals who are flexible and inventive – ideal managers of patient care and health care delivery. ATs are generally an alternative – not an additional – provider of physical medicine therapies. ATs are an “or” not an “and”; therefore, costs for providing therapy are *not* increased with the use of athletic training services.

13. FACT: ATs specialize in patient education to prevent injury and re-injury and reduce rehabilitative and other health care costs.

Recent studies, reports, outcomes measurement surveys, total joint replacement studies and many other case studies demonstrate how the services of ATs save money for employers and improve quality of life for patients. For each \$1 invested in preventive care, employers gained up to a \$7 return on investment according to one NATA survey. The use of certified athletic trainers supports a consumer-driven health care economy that increases competition in order to reduce patient and disease costs. With proper rehabilitation and evaluation, athletic trainers prevent re-injury. The patient’s standard of care is enhanced, not sacrificed, with ATs.

14. FACT: ATs provide the same or better outcomes in clinical settings as other providers.

Results of a comparative analysis of care provided by certified athletic trainers and physical therapists in a clinical setting indicated ATs provide the same levels of outcomes, value and patient satisfaction as physical therapists in a clinical setting (Ref: Reimbursement of Athletic Training by Albohm, MJ; Campbell, Konin, pp. 25). Patient satisfaction ratings are more than 96 percent when treatment is provided by ATs.

15. FACT: The National Athletic Trainers’ Association represents 30,000 members.

The National Athletic Trainers’ Association (NATA), founded in 1950, represents more than 30,000 members of the international profession. Of the total membership, 26,000 are ATs, representing about 85 percent of all athletic trainers practicing in the United States. NATA accurately claims the distinction of representing the great majority of athletic training professionals.

Testimonials from Employers and Friends of Athletic Trainers

Legislators and Regulators

“As a state legislator concerned with health policy, affordable and accessible health care for all people is my primary concern. We must look for innovative solutions to providing health care because of the increasing shortages of nurses and other health care workers. One of the best ways to deliver health care services in the community is to better utilize certified athletic trainers. Athletic trainers are multi-skilled allied health care professionals who provide a unique combination of injury and illness treatment and rehabilitation with a substantial dose of injury prevention and general wellness.”

-- Representative Jerry Krummel, Oregon House of Representatives, District 26

Occupational and Industrial Setting

“Our company has had a certified athletic trainer on site since 2000 and since that time we have recognized the tremendous upside in the tangible and intangible benefits of this addition, including a savings of more than \$245,000 in just 2002 alone in health care-related expenditures. We have also experienced a decrease of 67 percent for health care costs related to the low back. Additionally, our days away from work have decreased by 60 percent in the last three years. In the industrial setting, these results can be best accomplished by an individual with the medical knowledge and training of an athletic trainer. We wouldn't have it any other way and will continue this program for the long term.”

-- James E. Marotz, DO, corporate medical director at Appleton Papers, Appleton, Wis.

“The certified athletic trainer is my first choice for on-site health care for our insureds. The clinical skills for treating musculoskeletal disorders, first aid knowledge and ability to develop health/wellness programs make the AT extremely valuable. Maybe most importantly, the AT understands motivation and the psychology of performance. That seems to make a big difference. I'm designing risk control strategies based on the Sports Medicine model and the AT is central to that model.”

-- Benjamin Atkinson, worker compensation director Risk Control, CAN Insurance, Chicago, Ill.

Physicians, Hospitals and Clinics

“The educational background of a certified athletic trainer is the perfect preparation for assisting an orthopaedic surgeon. The knowledge of musculoskeletal anatomy, function and clinical experience in the diagnosis and treatment of musculoskeletal disorders is virtually unmatched, even amongst medical students. I believe that ATs are the best physician extenders, and I use them in that role daily.”

-- Ron Clark, medical director, Valparaiso (Ind.) Orthopaedic Clinic

“I realized early on in my career that ATs are the only health care professionals who devote their entire education and professional lives to taking care of active people. My patients experience excellent outcomes as a result of therapy provided by ATs. My patients love working with them. ATs are a value added service to my practice. I could not do without them.”

-- Thomas D. Kohl, medical director, family practice physician; director, Sports Medicine, Comprehensive Athletic Treatment Center, Wyomissing, Pa.

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