

Educational Innovations Drive Athletic Training

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Since the formal development of athletic training in the 1950s, it has evolved both clinically and academically to produce qualified health care professionals. Historically, potential athletic trainers would work one-on-one with athletic trainers in the clinical setting for at least 1500 hours and would take a few related college courses such as first aid, human anatomy, and general science classes.¹ The internship model was not formalized and there was no way to determine if the student was learning everything necessary to be a successful athletic trainer; thus, curricular models were developed. Through the curricular model, students would take more courses than internship students, and typically these courses would be in the education department or physical therapy program to make students more marketable upon graduation. Athletic training education continued to change after the original curricular programs were developed. Specific competencies ensured that students were proficient before sitting for the Board of Certification exam. Although professional preparation historically occurred at the baccalaureate level, the advancement of the health care system, the increased scope of care, the increased requisite knowledge, and the influence of peer health care professions have progressed the educational preparation once again, to requiring entry-level preparation at the postbaccalaureate level.² Postprofessional education pathways include residencies, fellowships, clinical specialties, and a terminal degree with the doctorate of athletic training.

In addition to educational advancement, the profession has expanded from our roots specifically in athletics to include performing arts, public safety, armed forces, occupational, and other emerging settings. The focus on “athletes” is now a focus on “patients.” We are moving away from being specialists with certain sports (eg, football or soccer) to having contemporary expertise in specific areas (eg, spine, manual therapy, emergency care). With the expansion of practice settings, the scope of practice and knowledge, skills, and abilities have also expanded greatly. There is a new focus on various advanced clinical skills and knowledge (eg, wound closure, pharmacology) to prepare athletic trainers to work in varied practice settings.

As the profession changes, so does the educational preparation. The transition to the postbaccalaureate level, the novel coronavirus, recently updated standards,³ and the new focus on marketing and recruiting have forced athletic training programs to adapt to new teaching methods and modalities while enhancing rigor. In the face of these challenges, athletic training educators have shown resiliency and continue to innovate and provide unique learning experiences for their students. The mission of this issue was to examine educational techniques, both didactically and clinically, that can be used to enhance the preparation of athletic trainers. Athletic training educators have developed and implemented forward-thinking and cutting-edge techniques that are unique and effective.

So why is this issue important? We have a duty and responsibility to prepare athletic training students to be excellent clinicians who provide holistic, patient-centered care. We must ensure students are proficient in athletic training knowledge and skills upon graduation. We have expanded curricular standards,³ and all educators may not have been trained in these. Colleagues have developed unique and innovative ways to teach these skills and others. This issue will showcase these methods and provide educators with tangible techniques to implement in their classrooms to ensure students have the skills. From wound-closure skills to safe-space training to mental health interventions, we will learn novel techniques to teach some of the new standards and provide students with unique learning experiences. After reading about many of these techniques, we are excited to incorporate them into our courses, and we hope other readers will also use these teaching methods to further enhance the student experience.

REFERENCES

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