High stress levels have been described in a variety of service professions including medicine, nursing, teaching, and athletic training, in which stress, emotional exhaustion, and the potential for professional burnout is a very real concern.\textsuperscript{1-3} Burnout was first described in the literature in the mid-1970s as a reaction to chronic stress that involves a negative interaction between environmental and personal characteristics.\textsuperscript{1,4} Shortly after this initial description of professional burnout, numerous articles were published that pointed out the time demands placed on athletic trainers and their potential for high stress levels and burnout.\textsuperscript{5-7} Reports have shown that many, if not most, athletic trainers work in excess of 50 hours per week.\textsuperscript{8,9} This time commitment in our professional setting might significantly diminish the time we have available for our family or personal lives. When we must establish our life priorities, we might say family is number one, but oftentimes working more hours becomes our reality, again potentially creating anguish and frustration. Data collected by Robinson on successful executives showed that the desire for family happiness was stated as one of their highest priorities, yet the actual time spent with family was not listed as a high priority.\textsuperscript{10}

### Key Points

- Certified athletic trainers work in a time-intensive profession and are at risk for high levels of stress.
- The time-intensive nature of the profession often results in little personal or family time.
- ATCs must take advantage of various recommended strategies to achieve balance in their professional and personal lives.

Key Words: professional burnout, stress management, quality of life, achieving success

Achieving Success

There are many resources available today that tell us how to improve our professional lives, such as how to develop habits that will help us be effective,\textsuperscript{11} that success is a choice

Several years ago one of our program graduates attended the NATA Awards Luncheon. He mentioned that what had the biggest impact on him was that during their acceptance comments, virtually all the new inductees into the NATA Hall of Fame publicly apologized to their families for spending so much time away from them during their careers. Our profession’s most highly respected professional role models were all apologizing for putting in the time necessary to achieve professional excellence! Taking a cue from this former student’s perceptive and powerful observation, we have reflected a great deal about what it takes to be a high-achieving professional, what cost it might have on our personal lives, and how we can best achieve balance in our lives. The primary purpose of this article is to examine some thoughts regarding the achievement of professional success and to recommend strategies for reducing stress and attaining better balance in our lifestyles. There are many factors in our profession affecting our levels of stress, including long work hours, minimal control over schedules, overlapping responsibilities, modest paychecks, and numerous expectations outside the health-care aspects of our jobs.
and how we can all be successful, and how to have extraordinary careers by adhering to various behavior patterns. Take a moment to reflect about someone you think has achieved a high level of excellence and respect in his or her profession. What character traits have led that person to that level of success? Once you have identified this person, ask yourself, does this person put in countless hours at work, or do they seem to have a good balance between their work lives and their personal lives? Have they been able to effectively juggle their lives in a way that balances their physical, spiritual, mental, social, and emotional well-being? In a time-intensive profession such as athletic training, “outworking” one’s colleagues becomes a daunting task. We must be cognizant that some people seem to thrive on stress, pressure, and long hours, whereas others quickly reach a point of diminishing returns. We might ask ourselves how is it possible that we do have members of our profession who are excellent at what they do and maintain a relative balance in their lives. One might also ask why some develop a sense of “chronic responsibility syndrome” in which they truly believe that their job responsibilities cannot be delegated or done by anyone else. We are valued and complimented at work for putting in long hours, being dedicated, and our excellent “work ethic” (or is it “overwork ethic”), yet we are seldom given praise for taking the time to be with our families or accomplishing things outside our professional responsibilities.

In order to better understand balance in our lives, it is useful to look at some of the guidelines that are available. A particularly helpful resource we have found is a book titled Work to Live. This book addresses much of the stress created by our fast-paced, technologically advanced culture and our attitudes regarding the need to almost incessantly “push forward” and “get ahead.” It also asks us to take time to consider our true priorities and better balance our lives. Even though we all have different personalities and react to stress in different ways, we all can use helpful strategies to assist us in reducing the likelihood of our lives losing balance (see the sidebar).

### Implementing Strategies That Could Help Balance Our Lives

Most of us are aware of much of this information related to how stress is created, negative results from stress, and strategies available to manage stress. Much of the problem lies in the fact that we often do not “practice what we preach.” Some of us actually perform better when we are challenged and under more stress, yet we need to be aware of the potential for various health problems when stress continues for long periods of time. Perrin stated that certified athletic trainers are notorious for working excessive hours in comparison with other health-care personnel and educators and that efficient time management represents the first step toward achieving balance between one’s professional and personal lives. Surprisingly, Holt et al. reported that only 4% of their respondents reported using organization and time management as means to limit stress. They concluded that certified athletic trainers needed to increase their awareness of prevention techniques and incorporate them into their daily routines. Those in administrative and supervisory roles, such as head athletic trainers, program directors, and athletic directors, can assist their staff members by recommending and facilitating some of these techniques and strategies for reducing stress. They need to be aware of the differing personalities and personal obligations of their colleagues in order to help them implement these strategies.

At our institution we have used several of the recommendations listed in the sidebar to attempt to reduce stress levels in our professional lives. As a staff we determined that our greatest cause of stress was the amount of time we spent at work, which limited our personal time. We reestablished our coverage priorities and determined that we did all not need to be in our

### Suggested Strategies for Reducing Stress

1. Examine what causes your stress, and make modifications when possible.
2. Take time to reflect and set your priorities (learn to say no).
3. Do not view leisure time as nonproductive (we all need “me” time).
4. Achieve better time management (learn to evaluate consequences for not doing something right away).
5. Develop hobbies and outside interests.
6. Get adequate rest, nutrition, and exercise.
7. Have realistic expectations.