Once a female athletic trainer (AT) starts a family, she may leave the collegiate setting or the profession of athletic training entirely. Although the exact number of NCAA Division I female ATs with children is not available, several reports in the Journal of Athletic Training suggest that the number is relatively small (~25). Factors influencing the departure of the female ATs from this setting, or the profession, include role overload, kinship responsibilities, burnout, and life balance issues. Perhaps many of these female ATs leave the collegiate setting for a position that affords a more predictable work schedule, or at least the flexibility to address family and personal responsibilities when necessary. Despite the major challenges presented by a very unique and demanding profession, some female ATs have persisted and found ways to manage both professional and personal responsibilities.

Although the role of female ATs has grown considerably over the years, they account for only one-fourth of ATs in the collegiate practice setting. Several AT scholars have begun to investigate the issues surrounding retention and attrition of the female ATs. The purpose of this report is to present strategies for balance of work and family responsibilities identified in the literature. In addition, strategies are presented that were derived from conversations with three female ATs who are balancing the demands of raising a family and a full-time position in the NCAA Division I collegiate practice setting (Table 1). They represent three different geographical regions of the U.S., and each one responded to the same set of questions, which included a description of the workplace environment, factors influencing the ability to balance professional and family roles, the role of their co-workers and supervisors in achieving balance, and perspectives on motherhood and the athletic training culture at the NCAA Division I level.

The content of this report does not present the findings of a research study, but rather blends anecdotal and empirical information to illustrate the potential for both professional and parental success while working at the collegiate level. We hope to provide insights to female ATs who have children, as well as those who hope to start a family while remaining in the collegiate practice setting. Student retention data suggest that limitation of the amount of time available to parents to be with family is a strong deterrent for females. Additionally, the responsibilities associated with motherhood appear to influence the decision of a female AT.

### Table 1. Female ATs: Background Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Sport</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Care Provider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shelly</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>Assistant AT</td>
<td>Football</td>
<td>2 (twins)</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patti</td>
<td>18 years</td>
<td>Assistant AT</td>
<td>Track &amp; Field</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>25 years</td>
<td>Assistant AT</td>
<td>Football</td>
<td>2 (grown)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
about whether or not to stay at the collegiate level. We hope that the information presented in this report will promote optimism among females who are entering the profession as well as those who have been working in the collegiate practice setting.

Support Networks

Support networks, both in the workplace and at home, have been consistently identified as key reasons for persistence in the Division I practice setting, which may be critical for the female AT with children. In the workplace, support is necessary from both coworkers and administration to help an AT find a balance between professional and personal responsibilities:

The philosophy used at my school has been a significant contributing factor to my ability to remain in the role/position that I have today. One of the philosophies of the Director of Athletic Training is that family is first. He encourages all of us (including those without children) to have outside hobbies and leave the office when we can. This allows those of us with children the ability to use this time to have lunch with our children at school, take them to doctor appointments, and specifically for me, feed them home-cooked food as a family at 6 p.m. (Shelly)

Administrators who foster development of a supportive workplace environment can reduce the challenges associated with an extremely time-consuming profession. A recent study of effective life balancing strategies identified the philosophy of administrators and their support as factors for reduction of work-life conflict. Administrators, especially head or associate ATs, often serve as mentors and role models for staff members. By cultivating a workplace atmosphere that recognizes the need for flexibility and adaptability for management of personal responsibilities and interests, staff members can come to accept accommodations. The value of this approach is supported by the experiences of Shelly, who had this to share about the clinical staff at her university:

There is a lot of mutual respect and support amongst our staff, and we know that is one of the reasons why we [are] still together after more than 20 years. The staff has always tried to be a model for other programs, where female ATs are seen as an added value not unavailable and unproductive baggage. I would say that our staff is a tight group of like-minded ATs that have mutual respect for each other. This is essential to staying happy in a high-pressure environment like the one at our university. There are times when it is not easy, times like two-a-days in August when I think I should get out. However, I found that these tough times have evolved over the years into something that I would consider more manageable in part because of the friends that I work with.

Sally, another mother working full time at the NCAA Division I practice setting, identified her number one reason for persistence as “achievement of a balance [professional and home life] due to my supervisor and coworkers. We have a number of staff members with families, so everyone is very understanding about trying to balance work and family.”

Family and spouse support are also critical in helping the female AT manage responsibilities at home and at work. Shelly stated, “I think the most important factor in my ability to play a very active role in a Division I football program while raising children is having the support of my family.” Shelly and Patti’s sentiments regarding family support is reflected in the AT literature, which has identified supportive family networks as essential in promoting a balanced lifestyle and necessary for the female AT to persist in the collegiate setting. Sally agreed with this concept and the importance of “ . . . [having] a very supportive spouse.” Support in the home setting can allow the mother to meet the time demands associated with patient care and travel, while still having the time to parent.

Job Sharing – Teamwork

The concept of job sharing was introduced into the workplace by organizations in an attempt to afford the employee, especially the working mother, more work flexibility to spend time on childcare and domestic concerns. The employer realizes the benefits of having a happy, more productive worker, without additional costs. The employee gains more time to spend outside the workplace. In essence, two individuals share the same job and responsibilities, both working on a part-time basis. Although the structure of job sharing for the collegiate practice setting could adversely affect continuity of care for an athlete, the fundamental principles of job sharing can be applied, i.e., teamwork and shared responsibilities. Consider Shelly’s comments.