EDITORIAL

A Balanced Body of Knowledge

Jennifer M. Medina McKeon, PhD, ATC, CSCS; Patrick O. McKeon, PhD, ATC, CSCS • Ithaca College

Since its inception, athletic training has taken great strides in the three major areas of professional development: clinical practice, scientific research, and professional education. Through the recognition of external health care entities such as the American Medical Association, athletic training has gained status as a true allied health care profession. Within the profession, there are internationally-recognized researchers, educators, and clinicians dedicated to the generation, dissemination, and implementation of the athletic training body of knowledge. However, as athletic training professionals have entered more areas of specialization, it has become clear that communication among these professional areas is not always effective and that they are drifting further apart.

Athletic training evidence is generated through the scientific method, based on questions raised through clinical practice. Once the evidence is generated, it is up to the profession and its educators to filter the best evidence and disseminate it to the next generation of athletic trainers. It is apparent that clinical practice, research, and education should not be working in isolation, but rather symbiotically to further the profession and enhance its value in the eyes of other health care professions and the public at large.

A central feature of a profession is its own unique body of knowledge. This body arises from research studies, the refinement of knowledge through empirical techniques, and systematic trial and error, as used in clinical practice. One of the fundamental skills required of the athletic trainer is the ability to understand questions that are raised in light of emerging evidence or clinical trends. By cultivating a strong understanding of the interdependence between clinical practice, scientific research, and professional education, this can be accomplished. Below, we first define these areas and then provide a model for integrating the evidence generated from each into a cohesive body of knowledge.

**Evidence From Clinical Practice**

Clinical practice is the backbone of the athletic training profession. This is the medium by which athletic trainers express their personal expertise, as well as demonstrate techniques and information that constitute the unique body of knowledge of the profession. From clinical practice, issues related to the clinical phenomena encountered, workplace challenges experienced, and gaps within the body of knowledge can readily be identified. By all accounts, an athletic trainer is recognized by his or her actions based on the athletic training body of knowledge.

**Evidence From Scientific Research**

Research is an essential element in the refinement and advancement of athletic training’s body of knowledge. From the gaps identified in clinical practice regarding the unknown or unpredictable, researchers develop questions to systematically answer via the scientific method. The profession’s body of knowledge can then be readily shaped and honed from what is gained through the research process. A major obstacle in this process is the delay, and oftentimes, the discontinuity in which research evidence can be implemented into clinical practice. Many of the advancements in athletic training research are lagging in their incorporation into clinical practice, making integrated discussion necessary to determine the best methods of getting research into the hands of clinicians and educators.
**Evidence From Professional Education**

The dissemination of the body of knowledge in its most current form is the goal of professional education. In preparing new athletic trainers to develop a working understanding of the knowledge and skills needed to function as a competent athletic trainer, educators work to filter the most important aspects of the body of knowledge and deliver it to students in effective ways. Advancements in research and new developments through clinical trial and error occur each day, making education a challenge. How does the educator keep pace with the ever-changing body of knowledge?

**Interdependence and Integration**

Too often, our experts in each of these areas fail to communicate effectively with those in other areas. This lack of communication may result in misunderstanding; or even more disconcerting, the opportunity to engage and establish a broader understanding and improved contextualization of the information that is being generated independently within these three areas may be missed.

It is important to see the interdependence of each area. Like three sides of a triangle, these areas represent the landscape of our body of knowledge (Figure). In order to see the broader and richer representation of our profession, these three areas must always be considered as one, and the impact of the outcomes associated with one area should be integrated within the context of the other two.

![Figure](image)

**Figure** The integration of the three areas of professional development in which the athletic training body of knowledge is generated, implemented, and disseminated.

Experts within our field have mastered how to communicate with others like themselves: clinicians with clinicians, educators with educators, researchers with researchers. We may even go so far as to believe that we are speaking effectively with those in other areas. Still, to provide a richer and fuller context to the body of knowledge of athletic training, a concerted effort is needed to actively engage and find balance across the three professional areas.

To truly advance athletic training’s own unique body of knowledge, we must see the interdependence and integration of these three professional areas at all times. Clinical practice is only as good as what we can repeatedly produce and disseminate. Research is only as good as that which advances clinical practice and can be implemented in the clinical classroom. Professional education is only as good as what can be based on sound, replicable clinical evidence and honed by empirical clinical practice. In short, we must be vigilant in seeing and connecting the corners of the triangle in order to capture the symbiotic relationships to advance our body of knowledge.

For the authors and readers of *IJATT*, as well as all the professionals in athletic training, we are providing a basic integrative model (Figure). Clinical practice, scientific research, and professional education are all represented as sides of the athletic training profession. Each side has information that would be expected to be presented, reported on, or taught when disseminating information pertaining to that particular area. In addition to what is already expected of each area, we encourage professionals to consider questions related to the other two areas (Table). For authors and presenters, consider including these answers within a discussion. For readers and all professionals, adamantly request, and successively require, this information from those presenting, educating, or reporting. Demand professionals to consider this interdependence and integration as it will only strengthen, broaden, and deepen our unique body of knowledge, thereby further advancing our profession and enhancing its value among health care professionals and the public at large.

In this issue, we asked Kent Scriber to provide his perspective on athletic training education and the profession as a whole. In his editorial, Dr. Scriber questions whether athletic training students are entering into a valued profession. He also points out that many athletic trainers are leaving clinical practice and turning toward athletic training education and