

# Secondary-School Administrators' Knowledge and Perceptions of Athletic Training

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The National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) recently celebrated its 50-year anniversary as the national governing body of the U.S. athletic training profession. According to

## Key Points

Athletic trainers need to understand the knowledge and perceptions of secondary-school administrators.

This information is critical for future employment and the quality of health care that is available to student athletes at our nation's secondary schools.

Concern about legal liability is an important issue for secondary-school administrators, but they have an inaccurate perception of the role and importance of athletic trainers in reducing liability.

The NATA Secondary School Athletic Trainers' Committee should focus more efforts on secondary-school administrators and the positive impact that certified athletic trainers can have on students and health care in secondary schools.

Key Words: survey, high school, liability

O'Shea, the NATA was established to "build and strengthen the profession of athletic training through the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and methods of athletic training" (as cited in Delforge and Behnke<sup>1,p53</sup>) Many events have occurred over those decades that have contributed to the maturation of the athletic training profession. Development of the athletic training major and curriculum, development of the NATA Board of Certification exam, and accreditation requirements for all entry-level athletic training programs through the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs have advanced the profession.<sup>1</sup> As a result, the athletic

trainer's job has evolved into that of a highly technical, well-educated, allied health-care professional, recognized by the American Medical Association in June of 1990.<sup>1-3</sup>

## The Problem

The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFSHSA) issued a press release on September 14, 1999,<sup>4</sup> stating that the number of students participating in athletics in our nation was at an all-time high. Currently, there are approximately 6.7 million student athletes participating in interscholastic athletics.<sup>5</sup> It is the position of the NATA that all secondary schools should provide the services of a full-time, on-site, certified athletic trainer (ATC) to student athletes.<sup>6</sup> According to the December 2001 NATA membership statistics, there are approximately 7,564 ATCs employed in either the high-school or the high-school/clinic setting.<sup>7</sup> The disproportionately large number of sports participants in relation to these secondary-school employment statistics provides evidence of the need for ATCs at the secondary-school level. A thorough investigation should be conducted of the knowledge and perceptions of the secondary-school administrators who would hire athletic trainers at these institutions. These administrators include superintendents, principals, and athletic directors. Accurate knowledge and positive perceptions on their part could have a major impact on job growth in this market. Likewise, inaccurate knowledge coupled with poor perceptions of the athletic training profession could lead to lack of growth of employment in this setting. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine the extent of knowledge and the nature of perceptions about the athletic training profession among secondary-school superintendents, principals, and athletic directors in NATA District Four. The Ohio University Institutional Review Board approved this project.

## Methods

### Instrument

The instrument was designed to measure knowledge and perceptions of athletic training among secondary-school superintendents, principals, and athletic directors. Ray<sup>8</sup> and Pinciario<sup>9</sup> developed the questions included on the survey used in this study. We updated some of the questions to more accurately depict the knowledge and perceptions held by the sample (e.g., the salary ranges were inconsistent with the NATA salary survey). Two content-area specialists reviewed the survey to ensure content validity. The questionnaire was pilot tested for reliability on a group of 18 ATCs. The first five questions dealt with the knowledge base of the administrators: acknowledgment of the athletic training profession, personal contact with an athletic trainer, familiarity with an athletic trainer's job functions, awareness of the goals of the NATA, and the acknowledgment of professional recognition by the American Medical Association. The next 13 questions dealt with the administrators' perceptions of the job tasks, salary, liability, and the most accurate name for the profession. Answers to the last seven questions provided demographic information about the administrators and their schools: age, gender, years of experience in the position, estimated number of athletes injured, sponsorship of football as an interscholastic sport, number of interscholastic sports, and size classification of the school.

### Sample

We enlisted the assistance of Clell-Wade Industries, a national publisher of all state high school athletic associations' handbooks for coaches. NATA District Four consists of six states: Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. We obtained handbooks from each state's high school associations, selected a simple random sample of 10% of the public secondary schools in each state, and mailed survey packets to the chosen schools.

### Procedures

The survey instrument, consisting of 25 questions, was mailed to 1,095 administrators (10% of the public secondary-school administrators in each state in NATA District Four). A packet of three surveys was

mailed to each school, one each for the superintendent, the principal, and the athletic director. Each survey included an attached explanation of the study and was given a letter designation for classification of administrative position (i.e., superintendents, S; principals, P; and athletic directors, A). The administrators were instructed to return the surveys in the self-addressed, postage-paid envelope that was provided. The state's initials were coded on each return envelope so that the survey could be entered into the statistical software program by state and job description.

### Data Analysis

*Statistical Package for Social Sciences* (version 10, SPSS, Inc., Chicago) software was used to generate descriptive statistics that formed background profiles of the respondents and to provide a summary of the questionnaire responses. Multiple Kruskal–Wallis H tests, matching the category of administrative position with each question of the survey, were performed to test for significant differences. For each significant difference, pairwise comparisons between group medians (Mann–Whitney U tests) were calculated to determine which administrative groups were different. We set alpha at .05 and performed a Bonferroni correction to control for overall error rate.

## Results

Of the 1,095 surveys that were administered, 234 usable surveys were returned (21% response rate). Cross-tabulation frequency reports (chi-square) were used to calculate percentages and to identify significant associations within the data (Table 1). Ohio provided the largest percentage of responses. The administrators most familiar with the functions of an ATC were the athletic directors (74%). There were 217 (93%) administrators who reported personal contact with an athletic trainer. We asked what tasks were required of an ATC. The principals and athletic directors consistently responded with the greatest frequency of correct responses for the most relevant tasks of athletic training. The Kruskal–Wallis ANOVA function revealed a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between the job-description variable and the survey questions "Familiarity with job functions of an ATC" and "Perception that hiring an