



PRELIMINARY REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE
TO STUDY THE SHORTAGE OF ATHLETIC
TRAINERS IN THE STATE
Problems and Suggested Solutions

Abstract

This document summarizes the challenges and solutions the Task Force discussed along with recommendations to address the shortage of athletic training in the state of Connecticut.

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Introduction

Having athletic trainers at schools, colleges and in places where there is a physically active population is crucial for the health, safety, and well-being of the physically active. In the state of CT “*physically active individual*” is define in Chapter 375a* Section 20-65f (5) as:

“any person who is (A) (i) a member of any professional, amateur, school, collegiate or other sports organization, (ii) a regular participant in a sports activity, or (iii) a participant in an exercise, recreational or employment activity that requires strength, agility, flexibility, range of motion, speed or stamina that is comparable to the strength, agility, flexibility, range of motion, speed or stamina required of a regular participant in a sports activity, and (B) deemed healthy by a health care provider;”

Athletic trainers are healthcare providers that play a vital role in preventing, diagnosing, and treating injuries, ensuring a comprehensive approach to student health. “*Athletic Training*” is defined in Chapter 375a* Section 20-65f (1) as:

“(A) the application, with the consent and under the direction of a health care provider, of care for an athletic injury, including the application or provision of (i) principles, methods and procedures of clinical evaluation, prevention, management, emergency care, treatment, disposition and rehabilitation of athletic injuries, (ii) appropriate preventative and supportive devices, (iii) physical agents, including, but not limited to, heat, cold, light, electric stimulation, manual therapy techniques, aquatic therapy, sound and therapeutic exercise, and (iv) any other physical agent prescribed by a health care provider, (B) the recognition of potential illness and referrals to a health care provider for diagnosis and treatment, (C) the organization and administration of athletic training programs, (D) education and counseling to physically active individuals, coaches, medical personnel and the community in the area of the prevention and care of athletic injuries, and (E) the provision of wellness care services developed for physically active individuals who are free of any underlying pathologies that are beyond the scope of practice of a person who practices athletic training”

The presence of athletic trainers offers numerous benefits and most importantly protects the health and safety of the public. Currently in the state of Connecticut we have several full-time positions vacant with other potential positions should personnel become available, and they have been for some time. We need to ensure that we are able to fill those and future positions by increasing the number of athletic trainers available and help in the retention of athletic trainers in

our schools, colleges and other settings where the need for care and prevention to physically active individuals is needed:

1. **Injury Prevention:** Athletic trainers provide education on proper movement mechanics, muscular imbalances, equipment fitting, conditioning practices, and other techniques to aid in prevention strategies to keep student-athletes and physically active patients at a decreased risk for injury. Athletic Trainers keep documentation of injuries to monitor trends and risk to create prevention strategies.
2. **Assessment, Evaluation and Immediate Care of athletic injuries:** In the event of an injury, athletic trainers are trained to evaluate and diagnose “athletic injuries” provide immediate, on-site care. They can assess the severity of injuries, stabilize them, and initiate appropriate treatment and/or referrals when necessary.
 - a. Athletic injury is defined in Chapter 375a* (2) *“any injury sustained as a result of participation in an exercise, a sport, a game, a recreational activity or any other activity that requires a level of strength, flexibility or agility that is comparable to the level of strength, flexibility or agility required for an exercise, a sport, a game or a recreational activity;”*
3. **Emergency Response:** In case of severe injuries, medical emergencies, and life-threatening situations, including but not limited to concussions, heat-related illnesses, and sudden cardiac arrest athletic trainers are skilled in providing care and making critical decisions in emergency situations. athletic trainers are an integral part of the emergency response team and are the first on the scene reducing the amount of time care is initiated.
4. **Treatment and Rehabilitation and Return-to-Play Protocols:** After an injury, athletic trainers design and oversee rehabilitation programs, helping the physically active population recover safely and preventing re-injury. They also manage the return-to-play process, ensuring that students are physically ready and medically cleared to resume sports.
5. **Patient-Centered Approach:** Athletic trainers are trained to assess not just physical injuries, but also the overall well-being of the physically active population. They can recognize signs of mental health struggles and make appropriate referrals for students in a timely manner.
6. **Compliance with Health and Safety Regulations:** Schools and colleges must adhere to regulations that ensure health and safety. Athletic trainers help schools meet these requirements, reducing liability and promoting a safer environment for student-athletes and the physically active population.

Athletic trainers are essential for maintaining the physical and mental health of the physically active population. They can help to ensure a safe and supportive environment with their clinical expertise in injury prevention, evaluation and assessment, immediate and emergency care, treatment and rehabilitation, and compliance of safety standards making their presence with youth sports, public and private schools, colleges/universities and occupational settings a critical investment for the state of Connecticut.

Athletic Training Labor Crisis

The athletic training (AT) labor crisis in CT comes at a time where we Connecticut and the United States are experiencing many healthcare professional shortages, including nursing, radiology, respiratory therapists, social workers and others. To address the need for practicing athletic trainers in the state a multifaceted approach, focusing on several key areas is necessary.

Considerations

- There are several vacant athletic training positions in the state that continue to remain unfilled. Additional positions would be opened but the different employment settings are have been refraining from listing positions that they feel will not be filled.
- The professional degree for athletic training transitioned to a master's degree from a bachelor's degree, this transition inherently caused a decrease in the number of athletic training students nationally.
- Four Connecticut universities offer Master's in Athletic Training degrees that transitioned from a Bachelor's to a Master's degree in and around the COVID pandemic which decreased numbers in programs as many Universities did in all majors.
- These four universities in the state are not graduating enough students currently to fill the vacant positions, and of those graduating many are leaving the state of Connecticut.
- Athletic trainers are often responsible for well over the current recommendation from the national athletic trainers associate for number of athletes and competitions per athletic trainer. This often leads to long work hours, evenings, and weekends without compensatory salary causing many current athletic trainers to discontinue employment as an athletic trainer.
- Insufficient Recognition of the value of athletic training as a healthcare profession has decreased retention in the profession. Lack of support and understanding of scope of practice and value of the athletic trainer as a healthcare provider, from stakeholder groups and those that hire athletic trainers. This leads to difficulty following through with best practices creating a negative environment for the athletic trainer and inability to do their job to the required standard.
- Other states have created retention and recruitment incentives [linked at the bottom of this document] to attract Connecticut athletic trainers and those students who have

graduated from our programs to move to address their leading barriers from reasons listed above.

- The NCAA has released multiple documents addressing similar considerations to the ones we discussed above and distributed to their member programs. Not all universities in Connecticut have followed the recommendations sent out by the NCAA and other states with university programs have begun to follow recommendations attracting people to work there

This task force was charged with addressing the shortage of athletic trainers in the state of Connecticut. We discussed and summarized these considerations and identified key challenges and solutions in the recruitment and retention of practicing professionals as:

Challenge 1: Education of Stakeholders

- Value and Role of Athletic Trainers:*** It's essential to increase awareness about the value and scope of athletic trainers' work, both within the sports medicine field, current emerging employment centers and to the public. This includes better communication about the structure and responsibilities of the athletic training profession.
- Outreach to Prospective Students:*** To attract future athletic trainers and develop the much-needed pipeline of future athletic training professionals, there needs to be targeted education on what the profession entails, reaching students early in their high school and early college academic careers to foster interest. Athletic training requires the master's level degree, capturing students at the high school and undergraduate levels is necessary in recruitment efforts.
- Recruiting efforts for the master's level athletic training programs in Connecticut.*** The state of Connecticut has four universities offering a Master's in Athletic Training (Central Connecticut State University, Sacred Heart University, Southern Connecticut State University, and the University of Connecticut) focusing on recruiting students early in their academic careers will assist in growing the student enrollment of each of these athletic training programs. It should be a goal to retain as many graduates as possible within Connecticut for employment.

Challenge 2: Financial

- a. As many students face after college graduation, athletic training students face significant student debt and financial strain due to loan payments, the costs of maintaining Connecticut licensure, national board certification, malpractice insurance, and professional association memberships (e.g., NATA). The shift to the required master's degree has added, at minimum, one additional year of education for the students at the graduate level. Graduate degrees carry different levels of federal financial aid often resulting in additional student loans. Athletic training students graduating with the

master's degree owe an average of \$86000, with loan debt affecting minority graduates at a higher rate. Addressing these financial barriers is critical for the retention of practicing professionals. Additionally, the average salary of an athletic trainer is well below that of what it should as compared to be for other healthcare providers.

Challenge 3: Retention of Practicing Professionals

- a. Supporting current athletic trainers through mentoring, professional development, and financial incentives is crucial to retaining them in the field. The state of Connecticut can play a major role in efforts to retain athletic trainers in our state.

Challenge 4: Mentorship

- a. There is a need for increased funding for workshops and incentive programs such as loan forgiveness or state-based return-to-work programs to alleviate financial burdens and encourage long-term careers in athletic training.

Solutions

After discussing these challenges, the Task Force proposed the following solutions:

Education of Stakeholders & Mentorship

- A grant fund to an athletic training organization located in Connecticut representing the athletic trainers within the state to provide mentorship opportunities for recently licensed athletic training professionals and stakeholder education to enhance student recruitment and retention

Financial & Retention

- Waive or reduce the cost of the Connecticut licensure fee (*waive the licensure fee*)
- Student debt - loan forgiveness 5k/year for 5 years (*similar to the undergraduate loan forgiveness program*)
- Scholarship funding to increase recruitment to offset education costs. (*something similar to the CT Horizons program for graduate level AT programs*)
- Incentives to bring professionals to the state (*7,500k per year incentive stipend per athletic trainer with an additional amount for athletic trainers providing care to underserved populations/rural schools and possible grant funding to help schools in rural areas or underserved populations*)
- Recommendations for the number of athletic trainers at a school based on the number of students participating in an athletic activity to ensure proper coverage of the student-athletes based on the Appropriate Medical Care Guidelines for the coverage of student-athletes by the National Athletic Trainers' Association.

What other states are doing

Alabama: <https://athletictrainers.alabama.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Act-2023-341-Athletic-Trainers.pdf>

Louisiana: <https://www.legis.la.gov/Legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=1289564>

Delaware: <https://legis.delaware.gov/BillDetail/141394>