

WHAT IS AN ATHLETIC TRAINER

Certified athletic trainers are health care professionals who specialize in preventing, recognizing, managing and rehabilitating injuries that result from physical activity. As part of a complete health care team, the certified athletic trainer works under the direction of a licensed physician and in cooperation with other health care professionals, athletics administrators, coaches and parents.

Students who want to become certified athletic trainers must earn a degree from an accredited athletic training curriculum. Accredited programs include formal instruction in areas such as injury/illness prevention, first aid and emergency care, assessment of injury/illness, human anatomy and physiology, therapeutic modalities and nutrition. Classroom learning is enhanced through clinical educational experiences. More than 70% of certified athletic trainers hold at least a master's degree.

The athletic trainer practices under state statutes recognizing them as health care professionals similar to physical therapists, occupational therapists and other health care professionals. Athletic trainer licensure/regulation exists in 44 states, with aggressive efforts underway to pursue licensure in the remaining states.

An independent Board of Certification Inc. (BOC) nationally certifies athletic trainers. Athletic trainers must pass an examination and hold a bachelor's degree to become an Athletic Trainer, Certified (ATC). To retain certification, credential holders must obtain 80 hours of medically related continuing education credits every three years and adhere to a Code of Ethics.

Athletic trainers have been part of the American Medical Association's Health Professions Career and Education Directory for more than a decade. Additionally, the American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics and American Orthopedic Society for Sports Medicine, are all strong supporters of athletic trainers.

Certified athletic trainers work in physician offices as physician extenders. They also work in urban and rural hospitals, hospital emergency rooms, urgent and ambulatory care centers, military hospitals, physical therapy clinics, high schools, colleges/universities, commercial settings, professional sports teams and performing arts companies. Athletic trainers are in great demand because of the continuing and increasing shortage of registered nurses and other health care workers. The skills of athletic trainers have been valued by sports medicine specialists for more than 50 years. As the U.S. begins its fight against the obesity epidemic, it is important that people have access to health care professionals who can support lifelong physical activity.

The National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA), founded in 1950, represents more than 30,000 members of the international profession. Of the total membership, 25,000 are athletic trainers, representing more than 80 percent of all athletic trainers practicing in the United States.