

The Future of Post-Professional Education in Athletic Training

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PURPOSE AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this presentation is to define and discuss the value of post-professional education in the athletic training profession. Following this presentation the conference attendee should be able to:

1. Define, describe, and value the importance of post-professional education programs and credentials to prepare athletic trainers for advanced clinical practice, and research and scholarship, in order to enhance the quality of patient care, optimize patient outcomes, and improve patients' health-related quality of life.
2. Define the mission, objectives, and outcomes of the NATA Post-Professional Education Committee.
3. Describe and discuss the purpose and value of NATA accredited post-professional graduate athletic training education programs.
4. Describe and discuss the purpose and value of NATA accredited residency programs.
5. Describe and discuss the purpose, philosophy, and value of Athletic Training Specialty Board Certification.
6. Describe and discuss the purpose and value of Certificates of Added Qualification.
7. Differentiate between educational programs and credentials that are designed to develop and validate advanced practice clinicians providing patient-centered care and educational training and certificates that are designed to meet the needs of specific employment settings.

BACKGROUND

Over the past two-years, significant changes have been developing in post-professional athletic training education. First and foremost, the former NATA Graduate Education Committee (GAC) and the Graduate Review Committee (GRC) became the Post-Professional Education Committee (PPEC) and the Post-Professional Education Review Committee (PPEREC), respectively. This marked more than a mere name change, but also a shift in the philosophy and responsibilities of the two committees. The PPEC has worked diligently to redefine the committee's mission. These changes occurred when the NATA Board of Directors (BOD) charged the PPEC to incorporate the work of the

Specialty Certification Committee (SCC) and to develop and implement specialty certification in athletic training.

At that time, the then GEC was only responsible for the development of the Standards and Guidelines for the Accreditation of Post-Certification Graduate Athletic Training Education Programs. The GRC served as the review body that would evaluate the self-study materials and conduct site-visits for NATA accreditation of post-certification graduate programs. With the expanded responsibility of specialty certification, the GEC transformed into the PPEC and began to look more globally at the needs of post-professional education in athletic training. The PPERC made a similar transformation and the two committees began to work together to redefine their purposes and the role of post-professional education.

Subsequently, the PPEC began an analysis of post-professional education in other healthcare professions including medicine, nursing, pharmacy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and physician assistant studies. Clear similarities in how other healthcare professions promoted and valued post-professional education emerged. In addition, the PPEC acknowledged two important, yet differing objectives. It was obvious from our study of other health professions that advanced clinical training and specialization within healthcare stems from rigorous training that is centered around more complex health issues relative to the patient and improving the quality of patient care. At the same time, a great deal of urgency and criticality was being expressed by employment-based groups with respect to post-professional education that would help move athletic trainers into emerging market settings, such as the industrial, corporate, hospital, and other settings. Therefore, two educational needs emerged that were fundamentally different in nature and scope: 1) patient-based specialization education, and 2) employment-based proficiency education.

Specialty certification, in all other health professions, is a credential that denotes the holder is a specialist clinician who has expertise in a defined area of clinical practice. The specialty areas of practice necessarily emerge from patient care considerations. However, until now, the profession of athletic training has only had one mechanism for formal post-professional education, the NATA accredited post-professional graduate education programs. While these programs have existed for over 30 years, they have not thrived in a professional culture that largely fails to value athletic training specific post-professional education where clinical specialization was not yet defined. Furthermore, these programs have varied significantly in their emphasis on developing clinical specialists. Therefore, the PPEC looked to develop additional advanced clinical training programs that would help an individual prepare for an advanced practice credential that validated specialization in patient care. To this end, the PPEC is beginning to evaluate changes to the current post-professional accreditation standards and guidelines that would support the development of preparing clinical specialists. In addition, the PPEC has started an initiative to study the feasibility and attributes of developing NATA accredited residency programs. Collectively, post-professional graduate degree programs and residency training programs preparing clinical specialists will support the development of specialty certifications as added credentials denoting clinical specialization.

Patient-based clinical specialization deals with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes pertaining to optimizing patient care, usually within a specifically defined patient population, such as pediatrics. Developing clinical specialists means developing clinicians who can: 1) solve complex patient problems, 2) practice based upon the current best evidence integrated with their clinical expertise, 3) contribute to the literature through research and scholarship, 4) measure and disseminate information about the clinical outcomes of the services they provide, and 5) ultimately enhance their patients' health-related quality of life. This form of education is rigorous and requires a significant investment of time and resources to accomplish. It is likely that communities of practice will also form around these common interests arising from complex patient problems. Providing high quality patient care will play a significant role in petitioning for the development of new areas of specialty practice.

Employment-based proficiency education on the other hand deals with preparing individuals to deal with the demands of a particular workplace setting. For instance, moving from the college or university setting into an industrial setting requires some new knowledge and skills related to ergonomics, repetitive stress-syndromes, third-party payer systems, and documentation for reimbursement, just to name a few. This training is critical to helping someone apply the knowledge and skills obtained during their professional (entry-level) education to be successful in obtaining and retaining a job in a new market. This form of education can be completed in a relatively short period of time and does not denote clinical specialization, but instead denotes clinical proficiency for a new employment environment. Therefore, completion of long (at least 1 year) residency programs and attainment of specialty credentials that denote advanced specialization are not an appropriate solution. Instead, quality distance learning opportunities or workshop forms of education need to be developed based upon job analyses that identify the critical knowledge and skills for transitioning from one employment setting to the next. Successful completion of these educational experiences should grant the participant a certificate of completion in the form of a CAQ. This would indicate the certificate holder has obtained added qualifications to work in an employment setting that they may not have otherwise been trained to work in. Employment setting based NATA committees, such as the Clinical, Industrial, Corporate Committee (CIC) will play a significant role in promoting and developing CAQ's to help members transition into new employment settings and emerging markets.

This brings us to where we are today. The PPEC has redefined its' mission that focuses primarily on patient-based educational programs and credentials. This includes NATA Accredited Post-Professional Graduate Athletic Training Education Programs, NATA Accredited Residency Programs, and Athletic Training Specialty Board Certification. In addition, the PPEC is working with the NATA Continuing Education Committee (CEC) to develop and implement educational programs that will lead to Certificates of Added Qualification. Therefore, the important, yet diverging, needs of both patient-based specialty education and employment-based proficiency education are being addressed through a comprehensive system of quality post-professional education. From here, I would like to provide and discuss several key writings describing post-professional educational programs and credentials that now serve to guide the PPEC. Collectively,

these programs and credentials will help to achieve the two strategic directions of the NATA: 1) increasing member personal satisfaction and professional stature, and 2) empowering members to utilize their skills, expertise and full scope of practice.

NATA POST-PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE (PPEC)

PPEC Mission

The mission of the NATA Post-Professional Education Committee is to promote accredited post-professional education programs and credentials that prepare athletic trainers for advanced clinical practice, and research and scholarship, in order to enhance the quality of patient care, optimize patient outcomes, and improve patients' health-related quality of life. The Post-Professional Education Committee seeks to achieve this mission through oversight and promotion of NATA accredited post-professional graduate athletic training education programs and NATA accredited post-professional residency programs, and through the development and oversight of athletic training specialty board certification.

PPEC Objectives

The Post-Professional Education Committee seeks to achieve the following strategic objectives:

1. Develop and articulate a vision that will shape the future of post-professional education in athletic training.
2. Develop a sustainable, multi-modal marketing effort to promote the value of post-professional education in athletic training.
3. Maintain and oversee of the standards and guidelines for the accreditation of post-professional graduate athletic training education programs.
4. Design, develop, implement, and oversee the standards and guidelines for the accreditation of post-professional residency programs in athletic training.
5. Design, develop, implement, and oversee the structure and process of specialty certification for the athletic training profession.

PPEC Outcomes

The Post-Professional Education Committee seeks to achieve the following outcomes:

1. Increase post-professional attainment of advanced practice knowledge and skills in the discipline of athletic training.
2. Support for expanded practice of athletic training.
3. Encourage research and scholarship in the discipline of athletic training to advance our unique body of knowledge and skills.
4. Support of programs that emphasize clinical outcomes research to demonstrate the effectiveness of athletic training interventions.
5. Emphasize advanced practice focused on patient-centered care that employs quality improvement and evidence-based practice.

POST-PROFESSIONAL GRADUATE ATHLETIC TRAINING EDUCATION PROGRAMS OVERVIEW

Philosophy of Post-Certification Graduate Athletic Training Education Programs

Graduate Education Programs are different from entry-level programs in purpose, design and content. The mission of a post-certification graduate athletic training education program is to expand the depth and breadth of the applied, experiential, and propositional knowledge and skills of entry-level certified athletic trainers, expand the athletic training body of knowledge, and to disseminate new knowledge in the discipline. Graduate education is characterized by advanced systematic study and experience—advanced in knowledge, understanding, scholarly competence, inquiry, and discovery.

Principles of Post-certification Graduate Athletic Training Education

Instruction in advanced skills and knowledges, the preparation of certified athletic trainers for leadership roles, and a research experience are considered to be the distinguishing characteristics of graduate education in athletic training. Advanced educational experiences designed to enhance the certified athletic trainer's ability to function in clinical, teaching, administrative, or research environments are considered to be essential components of the post-certification graduate athletic training education program. While minimal graduate courses and resource requirements are specified in this document, flexibility and innovation in curricular development are encouraged. However, the program must demonstrate its contribution to advanced education of athletic training practitioners.

The NATA Education Council has developed a comprehensive list of athletic training educational competencies and clinical proficiencies in order to provide guidance and direction in the professional preparation of entry-level athletic training students (see <www.nataec.com>). Thus, they represent important guidelines for curriculum design, development of individual course content, and structuring of clinical experiences for the entry-level programs. Development of an effective post-certification graduate athletic training education program depends on a thorough assessment of those education experiences typically offered at the entry-level. Post-certification graduate athletic training education programs include new and advanced, in-depth educational experiences designed to enhance the athletic trainer's professional practice.

RESIDENCY PROGRAMS OVERVIEW

Residency Programs Purpose

The purpose of post-professional residency programs in athletic training is to provide advanced preparation of athletic training practitioners through a planned program of clinical and didactic education in specialized content areas using an evidence-based approach to enhance the quality of patient care, optimize patient outcomes, and improve patients' health-related quality of life.

SPECIALTY CERTIFICATION OVERVIEW

Specialty Certification Purpose

The purpose of Athletic Training Specialty Board Certification is to provide the certificant with an advanced clinical practice credential that demonstrates the attainment of knowledge and skills that will enhance the quality of patient care, optimize clinical outcomes, and improve patients' health-related quality of life, in specialized areas of athletic training practice.

Specialty Certification Philosophy

The primary purpose of specialization in any health care profession is to improve the quality of care provided to patients, to enhance clinical outcomes, and ultimately, to improve the patient's health related quality of life. Specialties within a discipline arise in response to the development of new knowledge and skills in a finite area of practice that can positively affect clinical outcomes and patients quality of life. The rapid, dramatic advancement in health care knowledge and the expansion of athletic training into new and emerging settings has created a clear need for athletic training practitioners who specialize in specific kinds of treatment and aspects of care. Specialization in a health care field requires significant clinical experience in a prescribed content area, a sustained training effort, and culminates in a valid credential denoting clinical expertise. Specialty Certification in athletic training provides the certificant with an advanced clinical practice credential that demonstrates the attainment of knowledge and skills that will enhance the quality of patient care, optimize clinical outcomes, and increase population health, in specialized areas of athletic training practice. Specialty certification is a responsible, progressive initiative from the profession to try to ensure the best possible patient care.

Petition for Recognition of an Athletic Training Specialty Practice*

The area of specialization shall be one for which specifically trained practitioners are needed to fulfill the responsibilities of the profession of athletic training in improving the health and welfare of the public, which responsibilities may not otherwise be effectively fulfilled. This criterion addresses NEED.

The area of specialization shall be one in which there exists a significant and clear health demand to provide the necessary public reason for certification. This criterion emphasizes DEMAND.

The area of specialization shall include a reasonable number of individuals who devote most of the time of their practice to the specialty area. This criterion relates to the NUMBER of practitioners and the amount of TIME spent in the practice of the specialty.

The area of specialization shall be based on specialized knowledge of one or more of the healthcare sciences and the biological, physical and behavioral sciences which underlie them. Administrative, managerial, procedural or technical services and the environment in which athletic training is practiced, are not applicable to this criterion. This criterion relates to SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGE.

The area of specialization shall represent an identifiable field of athletic training practice which requires specialized functioning by the practitioner and which is distinct from other recognized athletic training specialties. This criterion refers to SPECIALIZED FUNCTIONS.

The area of specialization shall be one in which athletic training education programs and/or other organizations offer recognized education and training programs to those seeking advanced knowledge and skills in the area of specialty practice so that they may perform more competently. This criterion addresses EDUCATION and/or TRAINING.

The area of specialization shall be one in which there is an adequate transmission of specialized knowledge through professional, scientific and technical literature immediately related to the specialty area. This criterion refers to the TRANSMISSION OF KNOWLEDGE.

*Adopted from the Board of Pharmaceutical Specialties, "Petitioner's Guide for Recognition of a Pharmacy Practice Specialty". Available on-line at: <http://www.bpsweb.org/New.Specialty.Recognition/New.Specialty.Recognition.shtml>

CERTIFICATES OF ADDED QUALIFICATION OVERVIEW

Certificates of Added Qualification Purpose

A primary purpose of post-professional Certificates of Added Qualification in athletic training is to provide employment-based preparation of athletic training clinicians to practice proficiently in a specific work environment through a planned program of education leading to a certificate of completion.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Advanced Clinical Practice: Clinical practice that requires knowledge and skills beyond the entry-level and that is verifiable as the result of someone completing an accredited post-professional program or post-professional credential with the intent of imparting advanced practice knowledge and skills.

Patient-Centered Care: Identify, respect, and care about patients' differences, values, preferences, and expressed needs; relieve pain and suffering; coordinate continuous care; listen to, clearly inform, communicate with, and educate patients; share decision making and management; and continuously advocate disease prevention, wellness, and promotion of healthy lifestyles, including a focus on population health.

Population Health: Healthcare that focuses on the needs of a distinct population

Health-Related Quality of Life: Refers to the physical, psychological, and social domains of health, seen as distinct areas that are influenced by a person's experiences, beliefs, expectations, and perceptions.

Clinical Outcomes Research: The study of the end result of health services that take patient's experiences, preferences, and values into account.

Evidence-Based Practice: Integrate best research with clinical expertise and patient values for optimum care, and participate in learning and research activities to the extent feasible.

Quality Improvement: Identify errors and hazards in care; understand and implement basic safety design principals, such as standardization and simplification; continually understand and measure quality of care in terms of structure, process, and outcomes in relation to patient and community needs; and design and test interventions to change processes and systems of care, with the objective of improving quality.

NATA Accredited Post-Professional Graduate Athletic Training Education Programs: An accredited post-professional graduate degree program designed to provide instruction in advanced knowledge and skills, preparation of athletic trainers for leadership roles and research training, and has a demonstrated contribution to advanced education of athletic training practitioners.

NATA Accredited Post-Professional Residency Programs: An accredited post-professional program of study designed to provide advanced preparation of athletic training practitioners through a planned program of clinical and didactic education in specialized content areas using an evidence-based approach to enhance the quality of patient care, optimize patient outcomes, and improve patients' health-related quality of life.

Athletic Training Specialty Board Certification: A credential demonstrating that an individual has passed an examination to ensure attainment of advanced knowledge and skills in a patient directed area of practice at a greater depth than what is required of entry-level education. NOTE: This credential does not grant the holder the right to practice beyond that which the entry-level credential affords.

Athletic Training Specialty Board: Currently, the PPEC is serving as the supervisory body for the development and implementation of specialty credentialing in athletic training. However, should interest and demand dictate, then a separate entity with oversight responsibility for developing the standards for recognized specialties and their corresponding credential, called the Athletic Training Specialty Board, should be developed.

Communities of Practice: A group of people who engage in a process of collective learning and knowledge sharing for the sake of improving their practice.

Employment-Based Education: Education that is designed to provide the specific knowledge and skills necessary to practice proficiently in a particular employment setting.

Certificates of Added Qualification: A certificate demonstrating that an individual has passed an examination to ensure attainment of specific knowledge and skills in an employment-based area of knowledge and skills. NOTE: This is a certificate, not a credential, and does not grant the holder the right to practice beyond that which the entry-level credential affords.

Internship: A clinical education experience that is part of the requirement for graduation from a professional education program; a medical intern is an advanced student or graduate in medicine gaining supervised practical experience.

Residency: A planned program of post-professional clinical and didactic education that significantly advances preparation as a health care provider; in medicine, a physician who has finished medical school and internship and continues to receive training in a specialized area (surgery, for example) is a resident.

Fellowship: In medicine, some highly specialized fields require formal training beyond residency (like cardiology, for example); a fellowship accomplishes this specialized training through its focused, intense course of study.