

CAREERS

WHAT IS AN ATHLETIC TRAINER?

The role of an athletic trainer is often misunderstood. Certified athletic trainers are health care professionals who specialize in preventing, recognizing, managing and rehabilitating injuries that result from physical activity. The Certified Athletic Trainer works under the direction of a licensed physician, and in cooperation with other allied health care providers, parents, guardians, and athletic administrators. Certified athletic trainers are educated, trained and evaluated in six major practice domains:

- Prevention
- Clinical Evaluation and Diagnosis
- Immediate Care
- Treatment, Rehabilitation and Reconditioning
- Organization and Administration
- Professional Responsibility

ATHLETIC TRAINER VS. PERSONAL TRAINER

Although the roles of athletic and personal trainers intersect at times, they are two very different professions, which serve very different roles within their respective professions. In most states Certified Athletic Trainers must obtain a license to practice and the nationally recognized ATC[®] credential requires at least a bachelors degree from an accredited program, extensive clinical experience under the supervision of credentialed professional, and pass a very rigorous national Board of Certification (BOC) examination.

Personal trainers, on the other hand, are fitness professionals and NOT healthcare professionals. There is little or no regulation of their professional practice and there are very few requirements to obtain a personal training credential (some of which can be obtained with as little as a weekend course). The only similarity between athletic trainers and personal trainers is that both work with athletes, but we do very different jobs. If you are interested in becoming a personal trainer, you should consider majoring in exercise science.

WORK SETTINGS

There are a various number of settings that athletic trainers have the opportunity to work in. These various settings provide an opportunity to explore different paths within athletic training. The different settings include:

- **Secondary Schools:** Public and private secondary schools offer special job opportunities for ATCs. Parents and administrators are discovering the benefits a certified athletic trainer can offer in preventing and caring for injuries.
- **Colleges and Universities:** Certified athletic trainers in colleges generally fall into two categories: Athletic department and staff athletic trainer. A majority of colleges and universities now require a master's degree for employment.
- **Combination Teacher/Athletic Trainer:** Certified athletic trainers teach classes during the day and provide athletic training services during the afternoon and evenings. Employment in this setting remains stable with little turnover.
- **Professional Sports:** In this setting, certified athletic trainers work only one sport, such as football, baseball, basketball, hockey or soccer. Although teams operate only a few months per year, ATCs work year-round conditioning and rehabilitating athletes. Fewer jobs are available in this practice setting due to the limited number of teams.
- **Sports Medicine Clinics:** This growing setting provides certified athletic trainers the opportunity to work with a number of different health care professionals and a diverse patient population. In addition to athletic injury rehabilitation, many clinics provide athletic training services for secondary schools.
- **Industrial Setting:** Athletic trainers working in industrial settings are skilled in the implementation of injury prevention programs, ergonomic assessment, work-readiness conditioning, health and wellness programming, on-site physical rehabilitation, case management and return to work programs.
- **Performing Arts:** Certified athletic trainers have been working with performing artists for more than 25 years. World-renowned entertainment venues and performing arts groups such as Cirque du Soleil, Disney World and Disneyland, Radio City Music Hall Rockettes, Pittsburgh Ballet Theater, Cincinnati Ballet and Blue Man Group utilize an athletic training program to keep their performers in peak condition.

OBTAINING OTHER CAREERS THROUGH ATHLETIC TRAINING

There are many opportunities to expand career options through the acquisition of a bachelor's degree in athletic training. Many health related professions such as physical therapy, physician assistant, chiropractics, and occupational therapy are post-graduate degree programs. Therefore, it is vital that one obtains a bachelor's degree and also completes the necessary pre-requisite courses to be eligible for the application process. Many of the pre-requisite courses needed for these programs are fulfilled within the athletic training degree, thus making this obligation less of a burden on potential applicants. Below is a brief description of each career above.

PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT

Physician assistants (PA) are health care professionals licensed, or in the case of those employed by the federal government they are credentialed, to practice medicine with physician supervision. As part of their comprehensive responsibilities, PAs conduct physical exams, diagnose and treat illnesses, order and interpret tests, counsel on preventive health care, assist in surgery, and write prescriptions. Within the physician-PA relationship, physician assistants exercise autonomy in medical decision making and provide a broad range of diagnostic and therapeutic services. PA's practice may also include education, research, and administrative services. Additional information may be obtained from the American Academy of Physician Assistants at **AAPA.org**.

PHYSICAL THERAPIST

Physical therapists (PTs) are health care professionals who diagnose and treat individuals of all ages, from newborns to the geriatric population. PTs examine each individual and develop a plan using treatment techniques to promote the ability to move, reduce pain, restore function, and prevent disability. Additional information may be obtained from the American Physical Therapists Association at **APTA.org**

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

Occupational therapists (OTs) help people improve their ability to perform tasks in their daily living and working environments. They work with individuals who have conditions that are mentally, physically, developmentally, or emotionally disabling. They also help them to develop, recover, or maintain daily living and work skills. Additional information may be obtained at occupationaltherapist.com

DOCTOR OF MEDICINE (MD)

The modern practice of medicine occurs at the many interfaces between *the art of healing* and various sciences. Medicine is directly connected to the health sciences and biomedicine. Broadly speaking, the term 'Medicine' today refers to the fields of clinical medicine, medical research and surgery, thereby covering the challenges of disease and injury. Additional information may be obtained at <http://www.ama-assn.org/>

DOCTOR OF OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE (DO)

Developed 130 years ago by physician A.T. Still, osteopathic medicine is one of the fastest growing healthcare professions in the U.S. and brings a unique philosophy to traditional medicine. With a strong emphasis on the inter-relationship of the body's nerves, muscles, bones and organs, doctors of osteopathic medicine, or D.O.s, apply the philosophy of treating the whole person to the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of illness, disease and injury. Additional information may be obtained at www.osteopathic.org/

CHIROPRACTORS

Chiropractors, also known as *doctors of chiropractic* or *chiropractic physicians*, diagnose and treat patients whose health problems are associated with the body's muscular, nervous, and skeletal systems, especially the spine. Chiropractors believe that interference with these systems impairs the body's normal functions and lowers its resistance to disease. They also hold that spinal or vertebral dysfunction alters many important body functions by affecting the nervous system and that skeletal imbalance through joint or articular dysfunction, especially in the spine, can cause pain. Additional information may be obtained from the **International Chiropractic Association at chiropractic.org**.