RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE NATA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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The information provided below lists the recommendations of the Education Task Force to reform athletic training education. The reader is strongly urged to read this report carefully. Please note: only a brief rationale follows each recommendation due to publishing constraints.

RECOMMENDATION I

The NATA should work with the NATABOC to institute a requirement, to take effect in 2004, that in order to be eligible for NATABOC certification, all candidates must possess a baccalaureate degree and have successfully completed a CAAHEP accredited entry-level athletic training education program.

RATIONALE

The body of knowledge in athletic training is increasing at a phenomenal rate every year. while there are many high quality athletic training programs that prepare students for certification via the internship route, the manner of preparation is not currently consistent with an accredited, formal method of education nor is it consistent with other baccalaureate-level allied health professions. Many educational programs that now prepare students via the internship route to certification could, with a few modifications, qualify for CAAHEP accreditation if they were willing to submit to the review process.

The public, including members of the legislative and medical communities, simply don't know who athletic trainers are or what they do. The primary stumbling block to third-party reimbursement for athletic trainers is that the profession is almost completely unknown and unrecognized by lawmakers. Those familiar with the profession are very unclear about our education or certification processes. Consolidating our educational programs into a format consistent with other allied health professions will be a large step in clarifying professional preparation to legislators.

RECOMMENDATION II

The NATA should encourage the development of accredited entry-level master's degree programs in athletic training and allow entry-level master's programs to consider an applicant's previous didactic and clinical experience as a partial criterion for admission. The NATA should encourage the development of 2-3, 3-2, 4-1 and other creative models for entry-level education.

RATIONALE

The college a student chooses often has special qualities that both the student and parents desire in an undergraduate experience. The student's individual needs and desires should be considered in his/her institutional choice. With adoption of Recommendation I, students would have the opportunity to attend their institution of choice. If the school is non-accredited, students can pursue application to an entry-level master's degree program, or other accredited entry-level program at a different point in their academic development. Students who apply to these programs could serve as student athletic trainers during their undergraduate years. If a student has completed a bona fide clinical experience under the supervision of a qualified clinical instructor, the graduate institution could consider such experience as part of its admission standards. Similarly, an applicant may possess course work that would make him/her exceptionally well qualified for such a program. While this is an institutional decision, entry-level master's degree programs could consider such course work in their admission decisions.

Entry-level master's degree programs in athletic training will be expected to adhere to the same accreditation criteria as CAAHEP applies to undergraduate programs. This will present special challenges to the graduate

educators, but the potential payoffs, both for the institutions and the profession, are significant.

RECOMMENDATION III

The NATA should develop and implement a program leading to certificates of added qualifications (CAQ) for athletic trainer educators. The educational content of these continuing education courses would be developed by the NATA Education Council (see Recommendation 8). Certification of competence of the participants and the subsequent awarding of the credential should be contracted by the NATABOC.

3.1 The NATA should recommend to the JRC-AT that the *CAAHEP Essentials & Guidelines* be amended to include a guideline recommending that clinical instructors possess a Clinical Instructor CAQ or its equivalent by the year 2000.

RATIONALE 3.1

A common assumption in our profession is that every certified athletic trainer is qualified to educate students. Virtually anyone can supervise the clinical experience of student athletic trainers. This recommendation is intended to help provide those who supervise the clinical experiences of student athletic trainers with the tools they need to help them provide the most meaningful clinical education possible.

3.2 The NATA should recommend to the JRC-AT that the *CAAHEP Essentials & Guidelines* be amended to include a guideline recommending that program directors possess a Program Director CAQ or its equivalent by 2001.

RATIONALE 3.2

Educational program design, management, and evaluation are not entry-level skills. Increased standards for program directors would provide a useful service to those who would educate athletic training students.

RECOMMENDATION IV

The NATA should recommend to the JRC-AT that the *CAAHEP Essentials & Guidelines* be modified to reflect formal instruction in pharmacology and pathology.

RATIONALE

Although athletic trainers are generally prohibited from prescribing, storing, or dispensing prescription medications, they play an important role in the prescription medication chain from physician to athlete. Even in jurisdictions where athletic trainers are statutorily prohibited from such activity, they still remain a source of information to athletes regarding medication questions.

In addition, it is impossible for an athletic trainer to restore injured and ill individuals to normal function unless they can make rational treatment decisions, based on their knowledge of the body's reaction to injury and illness. Knowledge of pathology is basic to many of the activities identified in the most recent *NATABOC Role Delineation Study*. Although this is more implicit than the pharmacologically oriented activity, it nonetheless forms the foundation for many of the functions athletic trainers perform on a daily basis.

RECOMMENDATION V

The NATA should recommend to the NATABOC to re-evaluate the minimum number of hours necessary to sit for the certification exam and that the present high-risk sport requirement be re-evaluated.

RATIONALE

Most candidates who sit for the certification examination have far more clinical hours than the minimum requirement. Many athletic training education programs have clinical experience requirements that exceed the minimum recommended by CAAHEP and required by NATABOC. The perfect clinical education mix is still an intangible requiring constant monitoring and assessment. Effectiveness of clinical experience is more closely related to the quality of the experience, rather than the quantity of clinical hours. The fact that most students are already required to complete more than the minimum makes this argument more compelling. The definition of "high risk" requires additional study to address not only those sports of high risk but also areas

of high injury. This definition may need to be looked at in a different way.

RECOMMENDATION VI

The NATA should recommend that the JRC-AT investigate the extent to which the various practice settings in which athletic trainers are commonly employed are incorporated into the clinical and didactic components of the education programs.

RATIONALE

Inherent within *the CAAHEP Essentials & Guidelines* is documentation that encourages exposure to the various practice settings in which athletic trainers are employed. While this document exists, there is a need for validating where, how much, and what kind of experiences are occurring in the accredited institutions. A review of program annual reports will help to provide this important information to the association.

RECOMMENDATION VII

The NATA should subcontract the accreditation of advanced master's degree programs in athletic training to the JRC-AT.

RATIONALE

The mechanics of the program evaluation and review require special skills and knowledge. In addition to these special skills, time, financial resources and people are required to accomplish this task. The JRC-AT exists to evaluate educational programs in athletic training. As the expert body in evaluation and accreditation of athletic training education, it is logical to contract its services for the evaluation of advanced master's degree programs.

RECOMMENDATION VIII

The NATA should reconfigure the way professional education is organized. The NATA should establish an Education Council to act as THE voice for educational policy, development and delivery in our profession. Specific functions of the Education Council should include, but not be limited to the following:

- Maintain a constant dialogue on accreditation of entry-level programs through its association with the JRC-AT.
- Maintain a constant dialogue on accreditation of advanced master's degree programs through its association with the JRC-AT.
- Act as a resource for the development of doctoral programs in athletic training.
- Coordinate the educational content and delivery of all NATA-sponsored continuing education and CAQ programs.
- Serve as a resource to district, state and local continuing education program planners.
- Act as the approval agency for certifying continuing education providers.
- Develop new technologies for the delivery of continuing education programs.

The Education Council should replace the present Professional Education Committee. This recommendation is contingent upon approval of Recommendation 7.

RATIONALE

The essence of this multifaceted recommendation is to bring under one body all functions related to education in the association. There is a great need to present a coordinated, non-redundant approach to educational services for the membership. This council would function to coordinate, not stifle, all educational activities sponsored by NATA.

RECOMMENDATION IX

The NATA should cooperate with the NATABOC in its ongoing evaluation of the new rules for CEU accumulation and re-certification.

RATIONALE

Upon completion of the reporting period, the NATA is encouraged to cooperate in

every possible way with the NATABOC to determine the appropriateness of the 1994 standards for accumulation of CEUs. While only in the second year of a three-year cycle, the NATABOC is presently engaged in a process to evaluate the effects of these new rules.

RECOMMENDATION X

The NATA should develop and implement a program leading to certificates of added qualification (CAQ) for the post-entry level athletic trainer. The educational content of these continuing education courses would be developed by the NATA Education Council (see Recommendation 8). Certification of competence of the participants and the subsequent awarding of the credential should be contracted with the NATABOC. By the year 2000, an inaugural CAQ program in rehabilitation should be made available.

RATIONALE

Many are concerned that specialization will fragment our profession by creating interest groups with their own agendas. They are also concerned that the unity of purpose the association has enjoyed since its founding in the 1950s will be destroyed or compromised. The purpose of Recommendation 3 as well as Recommendation 10 is not only to prepare health care professionals for the practice of "generic" athletic training, but also for the special skills required in the special work environments. Although there are vast areas of overlap, the high school demands different skills than the sports medicine clinic. The industrial setting requires different skills than the university. There is no intent to water down the basic set of skills that have made athletic trainers so adaptable in the marketplace, in other words, the essence of what it means to be an athletic trainer. These recommendations are intended to help athletic trainers position themselves as uniquely qualified professionals in the job markets already identified and in new health care niches yet to be identified.

Recommendation XI

The NATA should encourage the development of multi-disciplinary education programs that combine athletic training with nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy or other appropriate baccalaureate level allied health professions.

RATIONALE

"Athletic training is a profession that should stand on its own!" is a common cry from many members. Athletic training does stand on its own and it is certainly not mandatory for athletic trainers to possess other skills or credentials. If, however, members of our profession are inclined to acquire additional credentials or skills, they should be encouraged to do so. Professionals who can perform multiple functions can provide more health care than those with a narrower range of skills at a similar cost. The health care market is likely to demand more multi-skilled or multi-credentialed providers as the dollars available for health care delivery continue to shrink.

RECOMMENDATION XII

The NATA should encourage new athletic training education programs to consider aligning themselves in colleges o health-related professions.

RATIONALE

With the highest respect to our historical roots, athletic training is now a recognized allied health profession. Athletic training programs over the past several years have developed in allied health schools. As new programs develop, consideration should be given to development of these accredited programs in allied health departments.

RECOMMENDATION XIII

The NATA should strongly encourage athletic training education programs to title their programs as "Athletic Training."

RATIONALE

Anyone familiar with the issues our profession has faced over the past few years is aware that the name "athletic training" is a source of contention among our members. For every argument against changing our name, another equally compelling reason can be found to maintain the status quo. The problem of inconsistently named educational

programs has political consequences for our profession. Physicians are educated in medical schools, nurses in nursing schools. Currently athletic trainers are educated in athletic training programs, sports medicine programs, physical education, sport sciences, etc. A unified identity of the organization's professional preparation would greatly serve our future.

RECOMMENDATION XIV

The NATA should encourage the NATA Research and Education Foundation, the *Journal of Athletic Training*, and other appropriate entities to recognize and reward high quality research in those areas of the body of knowledge specific to athletic training.

RATIONALE

Research not only improves the quality of clinical practice in athletic training, it helps legitimize our profession as a leader in health care for the physically active. The association should look for every possible avenue to reward and encourage high quality research in athletic training.

RECOMMENDATION XV

The NATA should encourage and assist in initiating the process of legislative reform, with particular emphasis on standardization of educational requirements for state credentialing.

RATIONALE

The present patchwork quilt of state credentialing laws define athletic training in such different way that planning for our profession at the national level – including education planning – will become more difficult with each passing year. Education and professional preparation should be the defining characteristic of our professional practice, irrespective of geographic region. A proactive approach to assisting with state credentialing as it relates to educational requirements needs to be undertaken.

RECOMMENDATION XVI

The NATA should work to identify and promote positive work models for the high school environment including, but not limited to, the full-time athletic trainer and the teacher-athletic trainer.

RATIONALE

The NATA's recent position statement on full-time athletic trainers being employed in the high school environment underscores Recommendation 16. Identification of positive work models that present a high level of professional and personal fulfillment should be promoted to future students.

RECOMMENDATION XVII

The NATA should encourage and provide assistance to the JRC-AT for the purpose of having it contract its administrative functions with a professional management firm.

RATIONALE

With the proposed changes outlined in this document, the accreditation functions and work load will outgrow our current staffing. The JRC-AT has responded to over 200 requests for accreditation information packets this year alone.