

National Athletic Trainers Association

Nomenclature Task Force

Final Report

*Executive Summary*Overview

President Julie Max appointed the Nomenclature Task Force (NTF) in May, 2003 to investigate the ramifications of changing the name of the profession and the association. In the event that a name change was recommended, the NTF was asked to suggest an alternative name. Members of the NTF include Denise Fandel, Thomas Koto, Dennis Miller, Richard Ray (Chair), Kathleen Walsh, Mike West, and William Wissen. NATA staff members Larry Commons, Cate Brennan Lisak, Richard Rogers, and Teresa Foster Welch supported the work of the NTF. The NTF met twice – in St. Louis in June, 2003 and Indianapolis in December, 2003. Each member of the NTF was charged with investigating the likely operational, strategic, and financial impacts of a name change on one or more of the following:

- Legal implications, including state credentialing laws.
- Member perceptions and internal marketing efforts.
- Corporate sponsor perceptions.
- Committee leadership perceptions.
- Hall of Fame member perceptions.
- *Journal of Athletic Training*.
- Liaison healthcare organizations and associations.
- Public relations.
- Reimbursement.
- Academic programs.
- NATABOC.
- NATAREF.

Legal Implications

Extensive correspondence with state association officers and credentialing boards revealed that a name change could, in most cases, be accommodated with simple changes in the rules governing such boards. However, every state law governing the practice of athletic training would have to be opened in order to provide protection of a new title. This is a concern for at least three reasons. First, opening state laws to the scrutiny of our competitors invites the risk of having our scope of practice rolled back. While it is true that in those states where this threat was the greatest the new credentialing bills could simply be withdrawn, the second and third reasons for caution become operant in these cases. The cost of this legal effort will be substantial, with some estimates as high as \$2 million over an eight-year period. The states have traditionally funded the vast majority of these legislative efforts, which gives rise to the final concern. In order for any name change effort to succeed, it must be comprehensive in nature. Every athletic trainer in every state must agree to use the new name (something we have a hard time achieving compliance with our present name). There is little guarantee that every state would be willing to commit the necessary funds and -- more importantly -- the substantial political effort that would be required to effect a universal name change. Indeed, there is some evidence from our research to suggest that this effort would be resisted by some states. The worst possible outcome would be to have allied health care professionals for physically active people known as athletic trainers in some states and athletic therapists in others, especially if this result was accompanied by a \$2 million price tag and acrimonious relations between the states and the national organization.

Member Perceptions

The Task Force conducted several surveys and focus groups with members in a variety of settings and forms. While it is clear that many members desire a name change, this is by no means a universal sentiment. A majority of respondents to a survey conducted at the national symposium in St. Louis favored the status quo, while the reverse was true in an on-line post-convention survey. Members who favor a change tend to be younger, although this is not universally true. There was surprising amount of conservatism on this issue among a significant segment of younger members. Older members, including most Hall of Fame members, tend to strongly oppose a name change. Though “athletic therapist” was the most commonly suggested alternative to “athletic trainer” there were dozens of other suggestions as well. It became clear to the Task Force that if we did change the name of the profession, “athletic therapist” is the name that would find the widest support. It should also be noted, however, that there is widespread opposition to this title in many circles. The membership argued with passion and fervor on both sides of this question. Those with opinions hold them very strongly. It is probably safe to say that changing the name of the profession would be very divisive. It could potentially drain away energy and support that is needed for other professional issues.

NATA Leadership

The perceptions, opinions, and desires of those who serve the profession in leadership capacities are much more defined and consistent on this issue than those of the members they serve. Most committees are opposed to a name change. The Committee on Reimbursement favors a change, and the CIC committee was evenly split on this issue. The World Federation of Athletic Training and Therapy – arguably the group that one could predict would be most amenable to a change to athletic therapist since it is already in *its* name – also recommends that we retain our present title. The Governmental Affairs Committee – the group that will bear the greatest responsibility for making a name change legal across the country – is unanimously opposed to changing the title. If the BOD moves forward with a mandate to change the name of the profession, it will not only be faced with convincing thousands of NATA members that this decision will be beneficial, it will first have to change the opinions of a vast majority of the NATA leadership.

Corporate Sponsors

Most industries with whom we have a relationship – formal or informal – are not concerned about this issue. They do not connect the value of their relationship with us to our title. In their opinion, their businesses are unlikely to be affected by a name change on our part. It is probably fair to say that we would have their support no matter what we decide to do on this issue.

Journal of Athletic Training

The editorial team of JAT opposes title change that would necessitate a change in the name of our flagship publication. The difficult and methodical process of trying to achieve indexing in *Index Medicus* would likely be hampered by a title change. The *Journal's* citation counts, indexing, and abstracting coverage would be negatively impacted by a title change.

Liaison Healthcare Groups

The NATA has formal and informal relationships with many other healthcare organizations representing a broad variety and number of medical professionals. We attempted to discern, through a variety of means, their level of support for a name change for athletic trainers. This task was challenging because of the highly charged political nature of some of these relationships. There were many groups who chose not to respond to our request for their opinions. Every one of the groups that did respond was opposed to a name change. Some said they would actively oppose such a change.

Public Relations

The members of the Task Force agree that no matter which way the BOD decides to act on this question, our public relations efforts will be critical to ensuring that the public

understands who we are and what we do. If a name change is implemented, a one-year initial PR campaign is foreseen that would require an additional \$100K beyond what is normally budgeted for this purpose. If no name change is recommended, our PR efforts must be enhanced to solidify and enhance the considerable gains that have been made in the public perception of athletic trainers in recent years.

Reimbursement

One of the most frequently cited reasons for changing the name of the profession is the assertion by some that this would result in higher rates of reimbursement for services provided by our members. While this argument is not without appeal or justification, there is little evidence that allows us to confidently predict that the increase in reimbursement – if it happens – will be large enough to offset the substantial costs – financial, political, and strategic – associated with a name change. Indeed, our members are making progress on reimbursement in many parts of the country even in though they are hampered by a name that does not adequately describe what they do or for whom they do it. The value of our services, not our name, is slowly being recognized. Would a name change quicken the pace of this recognition? It might, but to move forward on a costly issue that *might* have a narrowly focused positive impact with such a paucity of evidence seems inadvisable.

Education

Educational institutions, by their very nature, promulgate, reinforce, and preserve tradition. They are slow to change. Colleges and universities that educate athletic trainers have just lived through the most drastic and pervasive changes in the history of our profession. Many are still adjusting to these changes. Most desire a period of relative normalcy in their strategic and operational planning. Department chairs and program directors are opposed to a name change. While this is overwhelmingly true of public institutions, it is also true of private colleges and universities as well.

Allied Groups

A name change would have consequences and implications for the various groups allied with the NATA, including the NATABOC and the NATAREF. The REF is opposed to a name change. A name change would negatively impact the REF with regard to relationships it is cultivating with current and prospective donors. The BOC would be negatively impacted in similar ways. Beyond the likely financial impact (\$120K in the first year alone, with recurring annual costs estimated to reach \$500K over an eight to ten year period), the most troublesome effect for the BOC is the likelihood that it may have to run parallel processes (one for athletic trainers and one for athletic therapists or whatever alternative name is chosen) for most of its programs since a name change could not be uniformly implemented in all 50 states simultaneously. These costs would presumably be borne by the decade of students who form the body of new certificants after any such change is implemented.

Financial Impact

Changing the name of the profession would be costly. Many of the expenses are either unknown or would be the responsibility of other groups or agencies. For example, almost all of the education-related expenses associated with a name change would have to be paid by colleges and universities that educate athletic trainers. Certification-related costs would be paid by new certificants. Legislative costs, unless heavily subsidized by the NATA in a manner inconsistent with historical precedent, would fall to the states and their members. The total cost of a name change is predicted to be between \$1.3 and 2.5 million over an eight-year period. Some of this funding is already accounted for in the association's annual budget, while as much as \$1.05 million would have to come from reallocation of other funds, dues increases, or from the reserve. A more detailed explanation of the likely costs associated with a name change can be found in the appendix.

Relative Risks and Rewards of a Name Change

As part of its meeting in December 2003, the Task Force attempted to discern the likely advantages and disadvantages of changing "athletic trainer" to "athletic therapist." In addition, we tried to determine how confident we were that each of the advantages and disadvantages we identified would actually materialize using a 1-10 scale (with 1 indicating almost no confidence that a given event would happen and 10 indicating that it would happen with absolute certainty). The following table summarizes our opinions:

Advantages	Confidence Factor	Disadvantages	Confidence Factor
Enhanced recognition by Medicare and reimbursement officials	3.5	Costs to make a change	10
Consistency with letters ATC	7	Keeping "athletic" in name diminishes member benefit to those in CIC settings	7
Positive international efforts	5	Athletic therapist or any other proposed name is no more descriptive than the current name	8
Public recognition and perception is improved	6	Membership will be split on whether to change or keep the status quo	4
"Therapist" carries a "medical" connotation	8	NATA committee leadership is generally opposed to a change	9
Separation/differentiation from personal trainers	5	Requires significant energy for a project that is not consistently supported	9
		NATA doesn't control name	9

		consistency with related groups (i.e. state associations, outside publications, etc.)	
		Inconsistent legislation will result: high risk of potential reduction in AT scope of practice when opening practice acts	10
		Opposition from competition	10
		Distracts staff and volunteers from other projects and priorities	10
		Transition time	3
		Emotional and “patriotic” ties to current name by members	8
		Impact on educational programs	8
		Negative impact on indexing <i>JAT</i> in <i>Index Medicus</i>	7

Summary and Recommendations

The Task Force does not recommend changing the name of the profession or the association at this time. This is not meant to suggest that “athletic trainer” is viewed by the Task Force as the ideal name. Nor should the BOD interpret this report as a recommendation to do nothing. As critics of this recommendation will rightly point out, our name neither accurately describes what we do or for whom we do it. Our members continue to use our collective name improperly. The public – including legislators and payors – knows more about us than at any time in our history, but there is much progress that needs to be made on this front. Given these facts, the BOD should consider the following steps:

1. Redouble the association’s public relations effort. Spend the money that would have been needed to implement a name change on efforts to educate parents, schools, legislators, insurance companies, and government regulators about our roles, education, skills, economic impact, and value to society.
2. Establish a mechanism to ensure that every use of our profession’s name and our title is proper. When a newspaper article asserts that a major league baseball player’s “trainer” provided him with steroids, letters to the editor should be written to every newspaper in which the article appears. Phone calls should be made to the reporter and the editor. We should know about every use of our name in the public arena and react swiftly when it is misused. For example, when a university website references “trainer” instead of “athletic trainer” or “athletic

- injuries” instead of “injuries to the physically active” phone calls should be made and letters should be written strongly suggesting a change in language. A subcommittee of the Public Relations Committee could handle this effort. It could also be conceived of in a more serious way by making misuse of language an ethical breach. This decision would have to be made with great care since establishing the Ethics Committee as a kind of “language police” has cultural overtones that would need to be carefully investigated.
3. Finally, the BOD should consider if the time has come to change our mission in such a way that references to the kind of people we serve are eliminated. The nuances that help define who is an “athlete” and who is “physically active” are increasingly difficult to defend and explain. The fact is that athletic trainers, with appropriate physician supervision, can successfully treat a wide range of problems – with excellent outcomes -- across most of the lifespan regardless of whether the patient is physically active or not. This language restricts our professional opportunity in many of the same ways that the title “athletic trainer” does. Perhaps the time has come for the profession to consider the “nomenclature” issue in wider terms than just our professional title. This recommendation admittedly strays far from our original charge. It would require more investigation than we have done. It would undoubtedly have implications beyond what we know at the present time. But as the BOD struggles with issues of language, it ought not restrict itself to just our title.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve the profession. We hope that the information contained in this report and its appendices will serve as a useful guide as you help our association chart its course through these uncertain times.

Respectfully Submitted

NATA Nomenclature Task Force

Unanimously Approved on March 22, 2004