

# A Reimbursement Model For High School Athletic Trainers

**Definition**-Athletic training programs managed by certified athletic trainers who are employed and paid by a high school on a full or part time basis.

**Objective**-To receive reimbursement from third party payers for services rendered to the athletes, other students as applicable, staff and faculty.

**Typical Services Provided**-Strength and conditioning programs, injury rehabilitation services, counseling, emergency medical aid, evaluations and referrals to physicians and other allied health care professionals. Not all of the services provided will be reimbursable. Third party payers normally reimburse only for medically necessary procedures covered by that patients contract or policy.

**Audience and Patient Population**-Students, student-athletes, staff, faculty, administrators and the parents of the athlete or other responsible person(s).

**Who Pays**-The primary insurance policy of the patient which is typically held by the parent(s) or guardian of the athlete. The secondary insurance carrier, this may be a student or student athlete policy held by the school or it could be a second insurance plan held by a parent or other interested party.

**First Steps**-Obtain written authorization from the school principal, possibly the school board, the school's legal counsel and director of athletics prior to establishing a third party payers model. You may also wish to have buy-in from the school nurse, counselors, coaches and any other members of the athletic staff. To receive approval to seek reimbursement you should construct a business plan or business model. This establishes a "business" approach to your proposal and it will also validate that the plan should succeed. The information listed below may assist you in building the business model. However, since all situations and settings are unique, you will need to adjust the information to fit your particular concerns and issues. This information should provide you with a starting point. If you have specific questions you may wish to contact a member of the Committee on Reimbursement for additional guidance. To locate your local contact go to [www.nata.org](http://www.nata.org) and go to the COR Web page. A listing of COR state, district and national members is on that page.

## **Recommended or Required Tools-**

- 1) Computer hardware and software used to track patients and maintain clinical records, and for use by a billing person, billing service or billing software.
- 2) Staff or a service to complete forms and maintain records.
- 3) A policy and procedure book that you would build and maintain. This book of policies and procedures (P&Ps) should cover all probable contingencies that could occur within the program or to the student patient. The P&Ps would include procedures for being HIPAA/FERPA compliant and a procedure for contesting denied claims, billing policies and procedures. The P&Ps should be followed by all staff involved with the program, which will provide consistent and equal treatment within the program.
- 4) The NATA manuals on reimbursement, both manual I and II. The code manuals (Healthcare Common Procedure Coding System-HCPCS, Current Procedural Terminology-CPT, International Classification of Diseases-ICD) are also items to have on hand and available for reference.
- 5) You will need space/work area for the computer system, manuals, documentation files and any extra staff you may need.

**Licenses and Regulations**-Identify all state specific licensing and regulatory agencies, check with these agencies for any required documents or licenses you may have to possess prior to billing. You must review your practice act/license to define your scope of practice and your patient population. Contact the state insurance commissioners office to determine if there is an any willing provider/ provider non-discrimination statute in the state. Determine whether city/county business licenses are required. The high school or district legal counsel should review your proposal and verify there is nothing in the institution's charter or mandate that would preclude you from seeking reimbursement and billing. Counsel can also provide you with information regarding any other legal issues.

**Determine Costs/Set A Projected Budget**- Initial start-up costs are variable; what computer system and software you will be using, who will conduct the billing for you, how much knowledge and student/third party payer information you already possess can vary the start up costs. Below we have listed the start-up costs from one institution. Some of these costs are onetime charges and some are ongoing.

- ❖ Computer/setup and accounting software \$4000-\$7000
- ❖ Billing service, some services charge a flat fee per claim and some charge a monthly fee. The monthly fees range from \$175 per month to more than \$400 per month. Some billing services charge a percentage of collections or claims paid. Typically the percentage charged is between 7-11%.
- ❖ ATCs need to schedule additional time to work with the reimbursement program, for every 100 athletes on campus there is an estimated average of 4 hours of additional time required per month by the ATC staff.
- ❖ Added staff-You will probably need at least one additional clerical person on staff. You will need this person at a minimum on a part time basis. Estimated cost for a part time clerical person is \$8 per hour. If you use this person 20 hours per week your cost would be \$160 per week or \$8320 per year.
- ❖ Phone, fax and Internet lines.
- ❖ Fax machine and on-site printer for working with insurance companies and for transmitting/receiving medical records.
- ❖ One time charge for mass mailing an information piece regarding the new program to parents and athletes. Estimated cost .32-.60 per piece.
- ❖ Ongoing community/parental education programs. Costs should be minimal.

Once approval has been given to bill for services, you need to communicate this new process and the benefits the program will provide to athletes and any other potential patients, coaching staff, faculty members, health care and other staff, and to the parents or other parties responsible for the students' welfare. The parents will need to know what, if any, affect billing may have on their insurance policy.

You also need to have the authorization to treat form and the HIPAA private health information release forms signed. You will need the insurance or managed care policy information for each patient.

**Education/Training**-The ATC staff will need training on the billing and third party payer processes. They will need to know the guidelines that payers use and the internal P&Ps. The staff will need to understand how to complete and maintain health, injury and treatment records. You and your team will need to know how to document patient's files, which billing forms to use and how to complete them. Your billing person or will need to know the use and usage of CPT, ICD and HCPCS coding systems.

**Documentation**-These requirements should already be a part of your athletic training procedures for medical/legal reasons. (State privacy laws, HIPAA, FERPA etc.) But these definitely need to be in place when billing and receiving reimbursement from third party payers.

- ❖ Initial evaluation, including plan of treatment and goals. (SOAP notes)
- ❖ Appropriate medical history
- ❖ Examination results
- ❖ Functional assessment
- ❖ Type of treatment and body part(s) to be treated
- ❖ Expected frequency and number of treatments
- ❖ Prognosis
- ❖ Goals should be functional, measurable and time based
- ❖ Precautions and contraindications should be noted
- ❖ A statement that the treatment plan and goals were discussed and understood by the patient and possibly by the guardian
- ❖ Maintain daily treatment records
- ❖ Record any changes in physical status, physician orders or treatment plan and goals
- ❖ Weekly progress notes especially on goals should be kept (SOAP or function based)
- ❖ Copies of notes to or from the referring physician's office whether by fax, e-mail, U.S. mail or by phone
- ❖ A prescription or other state mandated documentation from a physician.

**Pricing**- How much can or should you charge for your services? There are several ways or methods to determine your fees; Your cost for a service, which is cost = time +materials+ overhead+ expenses+ profit. You may choose to use the Resource Based Relative Value Scale (RBRVS). RBRVS is the fee schedule that Medicare pays and it is available on the web at, <http://cms.hhs.gov/providers/pufdownload/rvudown.asp>. The government site is not the easiest to navigate for this information, so you may choose to visit your local Medicare carrier's web site. They may have a smaller and more regionalized set of RBRVS fees posted. CPT codes 97005- evaluation and 97006- re-evaluation do not appear in RBRVS as they are specific for ATs use and since athletic trainers are not reimbursable by Medicare at this time CMS does not list those codes. You may wish to use the physical therapy evaluation code and re-evaluation code for pricing comparison only. You can also use any other fee schedule available. Usual, Customary and Reasonable (UCR) is an average rate charged in your locale for a particular service or therapy and is commonly used by many third party payers. Whichever schedule you use, the payer will have it's own schedule and will normally pay based from that schedule. Any amounts over and above the allowable payment should be billed to the secondary insurance carrier or would be paid by the patient or responsible party.

**Revenue potential**-The revenue generated will vary depending on your state, your setting and how ATC "friendly" the insurance laws and regulations are. Revenue will vary by type of personal insurance or managed care coverage your patients have and whether there are any secondary payers, such as when an institution carries a secondary policy on student athletes. The size of your staff will impact the number of treatments and the amount of care you can provide, which translates to the type and number of procedures you can bill for. A rule of thumb estimate: each ATC could receive \$25,000 per year in third party reimbursement fees or approximately \$475 per athlete. The estimates shown here are from a university setting, but should be similar for the high school setting.

**Resources**-There are resources available to assist you in getting started and in maintaining a third party reimbursement system and the NATA staff and volunteers working with the Committee on Reimbursement can be real assets. You may also choose to use a consulting business service to help you get setup and started. If you use a billing service, it may assist by providing information and insight about the third party payers in your area.

You also may retrieve technical information from the Web. Your institution may be able to provide assistance to you as well.

*Our gratitude and thanks to Ivan Milton ATC, Committee on Reimbursement member, for providing the majority of this information.*