



# ATHLETIC TRAINERS

## IN THE ARMED FORCES

### Ensuring Tactical Athlete Readiness and Supporting Mission Success

Athletic trainers (ATs), often affiliated with sports, are health care professionals who also work with tactical athletes, such as armed forces service members. ATs have worked within the armed forces for decades to help reduce the risk of injury, improve athlete readiness and support mission success. ATs work in every branch of the United States armed forces with cadets, active duty service members and special operations. The rigorous physical demands of training and combat situations that result lead to a high number of musculoskeletal injuries (MSKIs) within the armed forces. In fact, MSKIs account for the greatest number of medical visits and lost duty time in armed forces populations. Approximately 25% of male and 50% of female recruits will sustain one or more MSKIs before they graduate, with almost 20% of those injured receiving disability-related medical discharges. These types of injuries compromise armed forces readiness, are costly and can reduce the quality of life for service members. As experts in the diagnosis, assessment, treatment and rehabilitation of MSKIs, ATs play a critical role in the individual service member's and overall unit success.

### About Athletic Trainers

- ✓ Within the armed forces, ATs work in entry level and basic training, military schools and universities, Ranger Units, Military Treatment Facilities, Special Forces Units, Fleet Marine Force, research and administration.
- ✓ Must graduate from an accredited educational program and pass a comprehensive certification exam.
- ✓ Are licensed and otherwise regulated in 49 states and the District of Columbia. Efforts continue to gain regulation in California.
- ✓ Must keep their knowledge and skills current by participating in continuing education.
- ✓ In conjunction with the state practice act, the AT's individual education, training and skill set determines their unique scope of practice.

*"Athletic trainers are a Swiss army knife - they bring a variety of skills to the table, they can handle concerns from heat illness to blisters to my chest hurts I can't breathe. They can respond to those things and yet they have the rehab and musculoskeletal expertise to rehab those injuries which is really where we lean on them. I like the versatility." - Nathaniel Nye, MD, Sports Medicine Physician for the U.S. Air Force*

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## Areas of Impact

### Emergency Care

ATs are knowledgeable and prepared to act when emergencies arise. ATs manage and provide medical care in emergencies such as:

- Extreme weather or environmental conditions, like heat illness.
- Sudden cardiac arrest.
- Traumatic wounds due to gunshot or explosive.
- Traumatic orthopedic injuries, such as hip/knee dislocations or spine injuries.
- Rhabdomyolysis.

### Injury Prevention

Injury prevention is a unique and valuable skill set that ATs integrate into the armed forces. By preventing injuries from occurring, or identifying them early, ATs reduce costs and improve outcomes. Some preventative measures include:

- Baseline assessments.
- Concussion screening.
- Functional movement screenings.
- Load management assessments.
- Ergonomics assessments and interventions.

### Rehabilitation

Injuries are inherent in the armed forces. In addition to the emergency medical care ATs provide, they are also critical to the rehabilitation of injuries. During the rehabilitation process, ATs ensure:

- Prompt establishment of a treatment plan and management program.
- Restorative care and return to work, sport or duty.

## By the Numbers

The AT's unique combination of skills including injury prevention, emergency readiness, wellness promotion and rehabilitation make a positive impact on health care and financial resources in the armed forces as well as improved quality of life for service members.

**\$2.5M**

Due to the high cost of training and high attrition rates, even a 10% reduction in medical attrition may bring cost savings exceeding \$2.5 million annually.

**55%**

Researchers in the armed forces have demonstrated a 55% reduction in injuries when injury prevention programs are implemented.

**800K**

More than 800,000 service members are injured each year, leading to an estimated 25 million days of limited duty annually.

**68K**

An estimated 68,000 soldiers per year are unable to deploy because of non-combat related MSKIs, creating an important readiness concern for the U.S. armed forces.