NATIONAL ATHLETIC TRAINING MONTH

MARKETING YOUR AT SKILLS 101

COPA committees share their tips for showcasing what ATs do best, no matter what setting they're in

By Claire Williams

Athletic trainers are valuable in every setting, and knowing how to show that value goes beyond injury management and returning to work or play is an important part of the job.

In the emerging settings, especially, where many athletic trainers are still taking their rightful place as health care providers, marketing the unique AT skill set can increase awareness and influence stakeholders' perception of the athletic training profession. Marketing your skills as an athletic trainer is also helpful when seeking new jobs in different settings and when justifying requests for additional support.

The NATA Council on Practice Advancement includes 10 committees, each committed to a specific emerging practice setting. Made up of successful practicing athletic trainers in their respective settings, these committees are a natural resource to tap for input on what those most important parts of marketing are for athletic trainers.

So, we asked the committee chairs – how do you market the value of athletic training in your setting?

Analytics and Outcomes Committee Chair Scott Mullett, MA, ATC, Community Outreach Committee Chair Andy Carter, MS, ATC, Performing Arts Committee Chair Amanda Donahue, MS, ATC, and Rehabilitation Clinic Committee Chair Paul Higgs, MEd, LAT, ATC, shared their top tips for showing your value as an athletic trainer across settings.

While all of their advice can be tailored to specifics, they all referenced similar topics that are applicable to showcasing value in any setting in both qualitative and quantitative ways. It came down to documenting data, building relationships, collaboration and sharing personal experiences.

All About Data

"Document everything," Mullett said. "As ambiguous as this sounds, documentation practices go a long way in athletic training. Not only will important information be collected and recorded, but detailed documentation is also helpful in moving the needle forward. From a Band-Aid to a conversation with a parent, it all should be documented."

Like Mullett, Carter, Donahue and Higgs all referenced collecting and tracking data as a key value marker for athletic trainers.

"Gather as much data as you can in as many areas as you can measure. You may identify a trend or an impact that you hadn't considered," Carter said. "These hidden impacts may turn out to be the best representation of your value to a particular stakeholder."

Consider all types of data, as well, including both quantitative and qualitative. Numbers can show monetary value and return on investment (ROI) for athletic trainers, but testimonials from patients and exposure to the community are also great ways to show value.

"When evaluating the marketing impact of having an AT on the sidelines of a football game, estimate the number of fans, visiting team members and others who could be considered 'marketing exposure,'" Carter said. "Evaluations such as these can help to bring value to the AT employer beyond pure clinical ROI."

Know Your Stakeholders

Athletic trainers communicate with multiple stakeholders every day; from patients and employers to community members many ATs also serve, including other local health care teams.

"It's critical to evaluate what is important to each stakeholder, or what value each feels that the AT brings to the organization," Carter said.

Then, Donahue said, connect with them.

"Create a handout showing other organizations in your setting currently employing athletic trainers providing health care to their artists," she said.

Mullett offered a tool that could assist athletic trainers in gathering feedback from their stakeholders: a satisfaction survey.

"Aligning with data collection, but taking a different approach – the idea is to present patients and stakeholders with a satisfaction of service survey," he said. "This will demonstrate the value of service from a personal perspective. This could focus on multiple areas, but the key is obtaining information, which will highlight the value of services provided."

Involving stakeholders in the athletic training process can also be beneficial to utilize when reporting data to employers or administration.

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Carter said educational opportunities are also great marketing opportunities.

"Practicing emergency action plans with local EMS personnel, reviewing policies and procedures with youth sport league officials and speaking to school faculty about returning to the classroom following concussion demonstrate the value and the expertise of the AT to the organization," he said.

Work Together

"Athletic trainers thrive in a team setting collaborating with other medical professionals for the mutual benefit of the patient," said Higgs, adding that the collaborative environment ATs can create and be a part of is important to highlight when reporting their value to stakeholders.

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"Improving value within the athletic training profession doesn't just center on patients or those paying the bills," Mullett said. "Interprofessional collaboration with other allied health care providers demonstrates

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that athletic trainers can work effectively with others."

Similarly, Carter recommends looking beyond the value of an individual AT.

"For the client seeking services, demonstrate what value the relationship with the AT employer (i.e., hospital) brings to the organization," he said. "Examples could be streamlined referrals to specialists, enhanced communication with a student's health care team and community good will."

Tell Your Story

"Leverage social media to communicate your 'why' and 'how' you can provide value to performing artists" said Donahue, adding that this recommendation is applicable to all settings. "If you have it, share your experiences as a performing artist and how traditional health care helped or didn't help you as a performer."

Athletic trainers can also utilize testimonials from previous patients, former staff or administration to highlight prior health care work and increase awareness of the profession to future employers.

Carter offers a similar crowdsourced way athletic trainers can market themselves: "For many, it's uncomfortable to market themselves – we're humble and don't like to tell others the good things we're doing. A solution to this issue is to have others tell your story."

Through building relationships with stakeholders who have some influence with decision-makers, ATs can show their value to others and secure their support when it comes time to make important decisions.

"When others speak on your behalf, it can carry more weight and be readily received as well," he said.

In addition to marketing tips from COPA's Analytics and Outcomes, Community Outreach, Performing Arts and Rehabilitation/Clinic Committees, NATA provides members with value models for specific settings that ATs can use to inform stakeholders of their value.

NATA value models are currently available for four settings: college/university, secondary school, public safety and physician practice. They are a great way to help ATs track their ROI for employers and the tangible results they bring to their organization.

Members can find the College/University Value Model at **www.nata.org/professional-interests/job-settings/college-university/college-university-value-model**. To access the new Secondary School Value Model, visit **www.nata.org/professional-interests/job-settings/secondary-school/resources**.

Visit **www.nata.org/professional-interests/emerging-settings/public-safety** to view the Public Safety Value Model. The Physician Practice Value Model is available at **www.nata.org/professional-interests/emerging-settings/physician-practice**.

Combining the use of value models and the marketing tips outlined here, athletic trainers are equipped to show the tangible, physical and emotional value they bring to their patients, employers and the community.

"Athletic trainers should base the value of their work on the service provided and the patient's outcome," said Higgs, adding that value is applicable to all settings where athletic trainers are providing care.

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