

Training TO BE AN ALLY

How the LGBTQ+ Advisory Committee is ensuring members have the tools they need to support LGBTQIA+ patients and themselves with confidence

BY CLAIRE WILLIAMS

“The hallmark of a good advocate is someone who is willing to take action,” Sean Rogers, DAT, LAT, ATC, said this when asked what athletic trainers can do to support their LGBTQIA+ colleagues and patients. The incoming District Five representative on the NATA LGBTQ+ Advisory Committee, Rogers was part of the committee team that created the Safe Space Ally Training course, available in the NATA Professional Development Center, pdc.nata.org, and structured face-to-face presentations on the same topic.

Since its inception in 2017, the LGBTQ+ Advisory Committee has been committed to the advancement of diversity within the athletic training profession by advocating for an environment of inclusion, respect, equity and appreciation of differences in both athletic trainers and their patient populations. The Safe Space Ally Training has been one of the committee’s biggest and farthest-reaching initiatives.

“The addition of the Safe Space Ally Training was imperative for members for several reasons,” said LGBTQ+ Advisory Committee Chair Rebecca Lopez, PhD, ATC, CSCS.

“First, it allowed the membership to have access to this crucial educational content that ultimately helps ATs create a more inclusive space regardless of their setting. Second, it helped to cement the NATA’s commitment to supporting LGBTQIA+ individuals and highlighted how important and relevant this content is to the athletic training profession.”

The process to creating a formal version of Safe Space Ally Training began in 2018. Former LGBTQ+ Advisory Committee Chair Pat Aronson, PhD, LAT, ATC, was also part of the committee team that developed the training, and during development, finding content similar to this for health care professionals was difficult. The challenge that created, though, because of lack of research and examples, led to more opportunity for the committee to take charge.

“The challenge with creating the Safe Space Ally Training workshop was that no other health care profession had already developed such a training,” Aronson said. “I had reviewed literature on what a successful Safe Space Ally Training program would include for secondary school students, college students and university employees, but no health care professions seemed to utilize this learning tool.

“We made the decisions on what content to include, the activities, the videos and the health-care disparities.”

The Safe Space Ally Training launched in the PDC in 2021 as a tool for athletic trainers to be culturally competent and inclusive to the LGBTQIA+ community while providing exceptional health care. In just one year, the training course has become one of the most completed courses in the PDC. In 2021, it was the third most popular course overall. Since it launched, 2,514 ATs have completed the training in the PDC.

There can be a bias toward the LGBTQIA+ community, whether conscious or unconscious, that creates a hostile or unsafe environment for patients in the LGBTQIA+ community, said

LGBTQ+ Advisory Committee District Five Rep. Emma Nye, DAT, LAT, ATC.

“Learning about strategies for inclusive care not only helps reduce biases, judgments and stereotypes, but also helps to increase health care access for minoritized patients,” she said.

The evidence-based best practices presented in the virtual workshop assist ATs in providing equitable health care, building an inclusive environment in their clinics and classrooms and providing the proper referrals related to the health care of the LGBTQIA+ patient.

“The inclusive approach ultimately builds not only a trusting patient-clinician relationship, but also an open and equitable health care facility,” Nye said. “The AT learns actionable steps to their inclusive health care approach through completion of the Safe Space Ally Training.”

Throughout the workshop, attendees discuss the definition of a safe space, terminology related to the LGBTQIA+ community, how to examine one’s own biases, health care concerns for the LGBTQIA+ population, how to create an inclusive athletic training environment and more.

“ATs have intentions of growing their knowledge and skill set to become more person-centered, and the response from the PDC course has shown just that,” Nye said.

In addition to the course content in the PDC, members of the LGBTQ+ Advisory Committee host live training presentations at national, district, state and local meetings.

“Members are following through with what we are seeing in the athletic training literature,” Nye said. “We have found, in recent years, athletic training clinicians and educators want more training and education on how to provide more culturally congruent and equitable care.

“We are very proud of the ATs who have completed the course and hope to see their skills implemented and reflected into the classroom and athletic training facilities.”

Upon completing the course, ATs are presented with a digital badge that can be displayed in their AT facilities or other employment settings. Many ATs have taken to social media to share their achievement and ensure it’s clear they are offering a safe space to patients and to colleagues.

The Safe Space Ally Training also represents the first course in the PDC to offer a digital badge after completion. This badge is an indicator of accomplishment or skill that can be displayed, accessed and verified online.

It’s important to remember, though, that being a culturally competent health care provider requires more than completing the Safe Space Ally Training. Lopez encourages members to continue to expand their knowledge about the LGBTQIA+ community and how to be an ally.

“This training is an introduction to the LGBTQIA+ community and issues surrounding this population both as clinicians and patients,” she said. “Those who have attended a training should continue to seek out more continuing education opportunities related to these topics and continue to expand their knowledge regarding the LGBTQIA+ community.”

Because of the evolving research and knowledge around providing culturally competent care and creating an inclusive space, Lopez said the committee is “constantly looking at ways to update and edit the program.”

The live version of the Safe Space Ally Training, for example, has been revised several times to remain up to date.

Also, because this training is considered an introductory course, Lopez said the committee is currently working on examining how the training can be expanded to provide ATs with more in-depth guidance and resources on how they can better

provide patient-centered care to their LGBTQIA+ patients.

While the training addresses inclusive care and provides numerous examples, the LGBTQ+ Advisory Committee also created an infographic handout to summarize its recommendations in a checklist that members can utilize. Members can view, download and share the “Checklist for Creating an Inclusive and Welcoming AT Facility” resource at www.nata.org/professional-interests/inclusion/resources.

The Inclusion resources webpage also includes documents on LGBTQIA+ basics, cultural competence in health care, LGBTQIA+ allyship, inclusivity in health care, athletics and education, inclusive policymaking and treating transgender student athletes.

“To this end, I would recommend using your power, position and privilege to effect change in your own sphere of influence even when that requires having difficult conversations or recognizing your own shortcomings,” Rogers said.

“This also means taking the time to address discrimination, harassment and microaggressions in the moment when they occur. I would [also] recommend a willingness to continue learning and focusing your CEUs on knowledge gaps relevant to this area.

“The Safe Space Ally Training is a great resource to provide foundational knowledge, but it is no means all-inclusive of all of the information related to high-quality patient care. Just know, you’re off to a good start.”

For more information about the LGBTQ+ Advisory Committee and the resources available to members on culturally competent and inclusive care, visit the Inclusion webpage, www.nata.org/professional-interests/inclusion, and Cultural Competence webpage, www.nata.org/practice-patient-care/health-issues/cultural-competence.

For more information and to complete the Safe Space Ally Training, visit pdc.nata.org/courses/safespace. The workshop is free for members, and can be accessed anywhere, anytime. Additionally, LGBTQ+ AC District Nine Rep. Amanda Tritsch, PhD, LAT, ATC, and Dani Mofitt, PhD, LAT, ATC, are hosting the Safe Space Ally Training in person at the 73rd NATA Clinical Symposia & AT Expo. Join them at 9:40 a.m. June 29. §



TIP FOR SUCCESS Earn Your Badge, Show It Off

The Safe Space Ally Training is the first in the NATA Professional Development Center to offer a digital badge after completion. Physical badges, or stickers, are also available at in-person presentations of the training. ATs are encouraged to share their logos, continue the conversation and display the token that ensures “This is a Safe Space for All,” in their athletic training facilities or places of employment and on social media.

