

Athletic Training Moves Away from Term 'Physician Extender'

NATA Board of Directors approve request to gradually eliminate identifier, focuses on AT branding

By Kathy I. Dieringer, EdD, ATC, LAT

District Six Director

During its January meeting, the NATA Board of Directors unanimously approved a recommendation from a combined group consisting of the NATA Committee on Practice Advancement (COPA), a task force comprised of athletic trainers working in physician practice setting, and the NATA Terminology Workgroup to "make a gradual transition away from the use of the term 'physician extender' to describe those ATs who work in the physician practice setting, with the goal of complete elimination of this term in the very near future."

Why? When the term "physician extender" was introduced and embraced by athletic trainers, it was used to describe any non-physician provider who worked under the supervision of a physician to "extend the services" of that physician. Hospital and practice administrators, physicians and major medical societies recognized and frequently used this terminology, and the NATA saw this as an opportunity to market the value an athletic trainer brought to this practice setting and patient population. The term also made it easier for physicians and other health care professionals to understand what athletic trainers did in this setting. Today, these same entities are moving away from this term and discouraging its use, as it does not adequately describe the credential held by the health care providers in this position.

Further, many athletic trainers have chosen to refer to themselves as a physician extender, rather than an athletic trainer, which diminishes the brand we have established as a profession. As health care continues to evolve, our profession will continue to secure our place as a valuable member of the larger health care team. The value of an athletic trainer is clearly demonstrated by the skill set we possess as health care providers, but that value is only further enhanced if we indeed refer to ourselves as "athletic trainer."

We challenge every athletic trainer to continue to identify themselves in a way that adds value to the profession, demonstrates our status as a health care provider and enhances our standing in the health care community. For those practicing in physician practices, we encourage you to use the phrase "athletic trainer in a physician practice." In doing so, we identify that we are athletic trainers first, and we brand the profession we have worked diligently to expand and to grow.