



Athletic Training in the Physician Office Setting: An FAQ for Athletic Trainers

Athletic trainers (ATs) are routinely employed in hospitals, clinics and orthopedic, family, pediatric, physiatry and sports medicine office practices. ATs working in these settings improve productivity, patient outcomes and satisfaction. They help move patients more effectively and efficiently through the appointment, evaluation and treatment process. By providing quality services to more patients in the same period of time, physicians are able to increase patient throughput and revenue generation.

What is the Role of an Athletic Trainer in a Physician's Office?

Today many physicians are choosing to hire athletic trainers as a part of their office staff. Athletic trainers provide value to the practice through skills in triage, taking patient histories, performing evaluations, providing instruction on exercise prescriptions, rehabilitation and general patient education.

The physician's office is a specialized setting within the athletic training field. Athletic trainers working in this setting *still work under their state license and scope of practice. No extra certifications or licenses are required*. Athletic trainers are, like many other health care professionals, considered "physician extenders." "Physician extender" is simply a descriptive generic term for a person who assists the physician.

If you want to work in a physician office, you will likely have to create the job by convincing the physician and practice administrator that you can provide value to the practice. Most jobs in this setting do not exist—you'll need to be creative and persistent to make one.

ATs increase physician productivity and efficiency by:

- Obtaining patient histories – may not be allowed in all states
- Performing evaluations and special tests – depends on state practice act
- Educating patients and answering questions
- Organizing notes and radiographic studies
- Presenting final case reviews to physicians
- Casting
- Splinting
- DME/brace fitting
- Performing therapeutic exercise
- Administering gait training
- Instructing in home exercise programs

Please go to this website for more on ATs working in the physician office:

<http://www.nata.org/athletic-training/job-settings/physician-extender-setting>

State Practice Act:

Check the state practice act link below. If your state has a very restrictive practice act, you need to research the employment opportunity and speak with a hiring authority, probably the administrator for the physician practice.

<http://www.nata.org/state-practice-acts>

Click here for more information on state regulatory boards:

<http://cf.nata.org/legislators/map.htm?q=state-government/regulatory-boards>

If you need additional information contact Judy Pulice at the NATA Office: JudyP@nata.org

Reimbursement:

Depending on the insurance company, you may be able to bill for services. For more information visit NATA Reimbursement:

<http://www.nata.org/revenue-resources/reimbursement/reimbursement-faqs>

Direct Billing vs. Incident to Billing:

If the patient is covered by insurance other than Medicare, you may be able to bill for services. An AT may bill directly to an insurance company if they are recognized or credentialed by the payer, otherwise AT services are billed by the physician as incident to his/her services.

If you need more information contact Patty Ellis at the NATA Office: PattyE@nata.org

What Are Incident to Services?

Incident to a physician's professional services means that the services or supplies are furnished as an integral, although incidental, part of the physician's personal professional services in the course of diagnosis or treatment of an injury or illness. When the physician practice bills for incident to services, it is billed under the physician's or clinic's NPI, the documentation should show who actually performed the service.

Practice Profiles: ATs in Orthopedic Offices:

<http://www.nata.org/sites/default/files/practice-profile-orthopedic-offices.pdf>

NATA Career Center:

To find a job in a physicians office please go to the NATA Career Center:

<http://www.nata.org/career-center>

Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Codes:

The athletic training evaluation and re-evaluation codes (97005-6) should be used by athletic trainers. The remaining physical medicine and rehabilitation codes (PMR) may be used by any

physician or health care provider. Go here for a comprehensive list of the most frequently used billing codes by ATs:

http://www.nata.org/sites/default/files/RehabCodes_0.pdf

Familiarize yourself with pertinent parts of the CMS guidelines on outpatient therapy services and documentation.

<http://www.cms.hhs.gov/manuals/Downloads/bp102c15.pdf>

2008 Salary Survey information:

<http://cf.nata.org/salarysurvey2008/index.htm>

Job Descriptions of ATs Working in the Physician Office Setting:

<http://www.nata.org/employers/sample-job-descriptions/clinical-athletic-trainer>

<http://www.nata.org/sites/default/files/PhysicianOffices.pdf>

Other Resources:

<http://www.aaos.org/news/aaosnow/oct08/managing4.asp>

Other Benefits for Physicians Using ATs in the Physician Office Setting:

Time savings – Athletic trainers help move patients faster through the appointment, evaluation and treatment process. This makes the physician more productive.

Patient satisfaction – Patients like the personal care and attention that athletic trainers provide.

Revenue – In some cases, athletic training services are reimbursable by insurance companies, services are either directly billed or billed incident-to physician services. Physical medicine and rehabilitation codes (97xxx CPT codes) are the most common codes used.

Patient education – Understanding the path to recovery helps put patients' minds at ease and improves both compliance and satisfaction. The athletic trainer usually ensures the patient understands the physician's instructions and is available later for follow-up questions from the patient. This AT-patient bond is important to outcomes and satisfaction.

Additional Information:

1. Academic Qualifications:

- Minimum:
 - Bachelor Degree with major in athletic training, holds the ATC (Athletic Trainer, Certified) credential
 - Experience with injury evaluation and rehabilitation
- Preferred:
 - Masters Degree in athletic training or related area if the bachelor's is in athletic training. 2-3 years of experience with injury evaluation and implementing comprehensive injury management strategies
 - Computer skills involving PowerPoint, Excel, and Access
 - Certified Orthopedic Technologist

2. Additional Certifications:

- NAOT
 - NAOT is dedicated to the pursuit of excellence through the continued educational development of orthopaedic allied health care professionals who specialize in casting, splinting and bracing. Please visit this website for more information: <http://www.naot.org/>
- Certified Orthotic fitter
 - BOC is an independent, not-for-profit agency that certifies orthotists, prosthetists, pedorthists, orthotic and mastectomy fitters and accredits their facilities. Please visit this website for more information: www.bocinternational.org

3. Work Load:

- Hours: 40 -45 hrs/wk, usually Monday – Friday only. Work Load: Work load remains stable throughout the year with slow periods around the Christmas holidays. Increasing volume during the summer months and the fall.
- Travel: None

4. Job Profile:

- Day-to-Day:
 - Injury evaluation, Injury prevention, Pre-participation physicals, Injury Management, Injury rehabilitation, Health education, Sports nutrition, Sports training and conditioning, Report writing & documentation
 - No emergency care

Supervision: Supervising Physician(s)

- Job Security:
 - Continuance of job depends upon ATs job performance and financial performance of the clinical team.

5. Supervision:

- Director - AT
- Physician

6. Tips for getting a job in this setting:

- Develop a strong rapport with physician(s). Diversify your clinical skills and experiences. Remain on the cutting edge of sports medicine. Obtain education in areas of other health care. Develop good skills in evaluation and management of musculoskeletal injuries. Improve your ability to work and communicate with many types of people/personalities.
- Find the busiest practice with the longest waiting room time and offer your services.

Q&A on Reimbursement:

Available for NATA members at:

<http://www.nata.org/revenue-resources/reimbursement/reimbursement-faqs>