The National Athletic Trainers’ Association  
2952 Stemmons Frwy  
Dallas, TX 75247-6196

Dear Fellow Athletic Trainers:

I am writing to you to present my feasibility report: **Athletic Training: A Change of Title is in Order**. The purpose of this report is to address the current situation concerning the inadequacies of the title Certified Athletic Trainer. This title hinders the profession because it no longer represents our current professional activities. The profession, whose past primary purpose was physical conditioning of athletes, has developed into a highly skilled allied health profession that is recognized by the American Medical Association. If action is not taken to rectify this problem, pride will continue to diminish, salaries will remain low, hours will remain long, positions will be limited, and research grants will be scarce.

During the course of my research, which included interviewing two prominent athletic trainers, a literature review, and two surveys, it became evident that the majority of the profession feels that our title should be changed to Certified Sports Medicine Practitioner. Additionally, the research confirmed that the majority of the public does not have accurate knowledge of our profession. It is my recommendation that we should take the findings of this research seriously and change our title to Certified Sports Medicine Practitioner in order to align the title with the current practice of the profession.

I would like to thank Dr. William Buckley and Dr. Craig Denegar for their time and involvement with this project. The completion of this report would not have been possible without their key contributions.

If you have any questions regarding the report, please contact me at the address listed above or via email at xxx999@psu.edu. I am looking forward to hearing from you soon. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

John P. ****
Athletic Training: A Change of Title is in Order

Prepared for:
The National Athletic Trainers’ Association

By:
John P. ****
7 December 2000
Executive Summary

In the beginning of the athletic training profession its primary purpose was to provide physical conditioning for athletes, but currently athletic training is an allied health profession that is recognized by the American Medical Association. They are no longer involved with what one would call “athletic training.” The profession’s title should reflect the position, but because it does not, it hinders its advancement.

The following criteria were established to evaluate possible solutions:

- The solution must suit the profession better than the current situation.
- The solution must have a positive effect on the profession.
- The majority of the profession must accept the solution.
- It has to be possible to change the title.
- There have to be alternative titles available.

Research was performed to gain information regarding this problem. First, both Dr. William Buckley, PhD, A.T.,C and Dr. Craig Denegar, PhD, PT, A.T.,C of the Pennsylvania State University were interviewed about the problem. They provided background information concerning the history of the profession and why the title is currently Athletic Training. They agree that the title does not represent the current professional activities of the group and feel that it should be changed. A literature review, that exploited the current frustration of the profession with its title, was also completed. The literature supports changing the title and most often cites Certified Sports Medicine Practitioner as the best alternative. Additionally, two surveys were
conducted. The results of the first survey show that the majority of the profession feels that the title does not suit their needs and should be changed to Certified Sports Medicine Practitioner. The second survey’s results proved that the general public is ignorant regarding this profession. The number of participants who thought that athletic training had medical responsibilities was equaled by those who thought the profession involved fitness training.

There are three possible solutions to this problem: 1) Change the title, 2) do not change the title and educate the ignorant, and 3) maintain the status quo. According to the research, the only solution that satisfies all of the criteria is to change the title to Certified Sports Medicine Practitioner. It is my recommendation that the profession take this step.
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**Introduction**

The strength of any profession is determined by the pride of which its members possess. Currently, embarrassment is frequently felt by many athletic trainers when having to explain or defend their profession when introducing themselves. The National Athletic Trainers’ Association was founded in 1950 to foster pride and advance the profession and at that time an athletic trainer’s main responsibility was to provide physical conditioning for athletes. However, the profession has changed tremendously. Currently, athletic training is recognized by the American Medical Association as an allied health profession and is no longer involved with what one would call “athletic training.” This profession is responsible for the prevention, recognition, assessment, treatment, rehabilitation, referral, and documentation of athletic injuries and illness. Ideally, our title would reflect the profession more appropriately. If this were the case, we would command more respect and further our advancement. Since it does not, it is often confused by many that we train athletes, which is a logical assumption. Consequently, this hinders the advancement of the profession as a whole. This is a highly skilled paramedical profession with many responsibilities but is perceived as less because of its title. In the academic world anything involved with physical education or athletics carries a negative, unintelligent connotation.

The following report will address this problem by presenting criteria to evaluate possible solutions, methodology employed to gather information, an overview and evaluation of possible solutions, and recommendations towards the resolution of this problem.
It is of utmost importance to work towards solving this problem because, if it persists it, will continue to hinder the profession’s advancement. Pride will continue to diminish, salaries will remain low, hours will remain long, positions will be limited, and research grants will be scarce.

**Criteria**

- The solution must suit the profession better than the current situation.
  - The current situation is hindering the profession.
  - Solutions must not hinder the profession more than the current situation.

- The solution must have a positive effect on the profession.
  - If a solution does not affect the profession in a positive manner it can not be considered a solution.
  - There is no sense in making a change that will create a new set of problems and negatively affect the profession.

- The majority of the profession must accept the solution.
  - If the majority of the profession does not accept the solution it will create a division among its members.
Athletic Training: A Change of Title is in Order

- It has to be possible to change the title.
  - This criterion only applies while considering alternative titles.
  - If it were not possible to change the title all alternative titles would be rendered moot.

- There have to be alternative titles available.
  - This criterion only applies while considering alternative titles.
  - The possible solution of changing the title would be automatically rejected if there were not alternative titles available.

Methodology

The following section will discuss, in detail, the research completed in preparation for this report as well as the results of the research. Research began with two interviews. The first interview was with Dr. William Buckley, PhD, who was a pioneer of the profession in Pennsylvania as well as the nation and has been a professor at the Pennsylvania State University for over twenty years. Dr. Buckley stated that when the profession began to formally organize itself in the early 1950’s the primary objective of athletic trainers was to provide physical conditioning to athletes within organized athletics. The profession’s focus has shifted through the years and is now an allied health profession. The title Certified Athletic Trainer does not represent the current professional activities of the group. He supported this claim by citing athletic training’s newest endeavors. Athletic trainers are currently pushing for legislation that would permit them to work outside of the athletics setting. They are already being employed in the industrial
setting to provide on-site medical care and prevention services to company employees and management. The title Athletic Trainer certainly does not fit that situation.

The second interview was conducted with Dr. Craig Denegar, PhD. According to Dr. Denegar, who is the undergraduate athletic training curriculum director at the Pennsylvania State University and is both a Certified Athletic Trainer and a Licensed Physical Therapist, the athletic trainer does not train anyone. They provide therapeutic services from prevention to rehabilitation for athletes, and are now heading towards expanding the practice to the public.

Next, a literature review was completed. According to Dr. Thomas Weidner, PhD, a professor at Ball State University, athletic trainers encounter frustration in answering the simple question, “What is your profession,” because most people do not understand what athletic training is by name alone. By reviewing the history of athletic training as a name, the current status of the profession, and examining the need to question the name he came to the conclusion that it is time to develop a title that will not hinder the rapid progress of this field. He argues that the title needs to be consistent with modern definitions and reflect the major performance domains of the profession.

Additionally, Robert Reese, an athletic trainer for the New York Jets Football Club and former President of the Professional Football Athletic Trainers’ Society, said, “After twenty years of explaining what I am, what I am responsible for, and what I do, I think a name change is long overdue.” He argues that the title is not established in the minds of
the general public or the academic arena and it has been a constant uphill battle to attempt to educate those outside the profession about what an athletic trainer is and does\textsuperscript{6}.

Research concluded with the distribution, collection, and analysis of two surveys. The first survey, Should Athletic Trainers Change Their Title (see Appendix A), was distributed to a random sample of 100 Certified Athletic Trainers and upper level student athletic trainers. Of the 100 surveys distributed 96 were returned. Its purpose was to exploit the current opinion among athletic trainers regarding this topic. This survey asked them two things: 1) Do you feel that the title Athletic Trainer adequately fits the profession, and 2) Do you feel that the title should be changed? They were also instructed to select an alternative title if they thought it should be changed and to provide the rationale for which they based their answers. The results are presented in table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Should Athletic Trainers Change Their Title? Survey Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Certified Athletic Trainers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n = 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title Suits Profession</td>
<td>Yes %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Title</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Title</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Titles</td>
<td>n = 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified Sports Medicine Specialist/Practitioner</td>
<td>46.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified Athletic Therapist</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified Athletic Rehabilitation Specialist</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified Sport Therapist</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The majority of the athletic trainers surveyed felt that the title does not adequately suit their profession and should be changed. Those that felt the title should be changed most often cited that most people do not know what athletic trainers do and confuse them with fitness trainers or coaches as their rationale. Many also stated that athletic trainer sounds unprofessional.

The second survey was titled: Do you know what an Athletic Trainer is (see Appendix B)? It was distributed to a random sample of 100 laypersons and asked the open-ended question: Do you know what an athletic trainer is? It also asked the participants to list four responsibilities of an athletic trainer. The purpose of this survey was to gain insight on what the general public thinks an athletic trainer is and does. All 100 surveys were returned and the results are presented in table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Perspective</th>
<th>Involved with Organized Athletics n = 74</th>
<th>No Involvement With Organized Athletics n = 26</th>
<th>Totals n = 100</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fitness Training/Conditioning</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach/Manager</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Responsibilities</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injury Prevention</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisor</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Boy</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taping</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor First Aid</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could Not List Four Responsibilities</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results of this survey show that the public’s knowledge of the athletic training profession is misguided. Surprisingly, persons having been involved with organized athletics perceptions are also distorted. Overall, the participants that mentioned medical responsibilities were matched in number by those mentioning fitness training. Additionally, almost one third of the participants were unable to list four responsibilities of an athletic trainer.

**Overview of Possible Solutions**

- **Change the title to better suit the profession.**
  - This solution entails evaluating if it is possible to change the title and if there are alternative titles available. Additionally, if there is more than one alternative title available it must be determined which is most appropriate.

- **Do not change the title and take a proactive stance in educating the public about the athletic training profession.**
  - This solution would require the National Athletic Trainers’ Association and regional and state athletic training associations to cooperate in forming public awareness campaigns.

- **Maintain the status quo.**
  - This solution would be to take no action and may be viable if it is determined that no other solutions meet the criteria set forth.
**Evaluation of Solutions Against Criteria**

The following will evaluate the solutions that were proposed in the previous section against the criteria set forth earlier in the report. The purpose of this step is to identify the solution that will have the best possible outcome while eliminating those that will have a less favorable impact on the profession. Before beginning this process the criteria should be reviewed. The criteria are as follows:

- The solution must better suit the profession better than the current situation.
- The solution must have a positive effect on the profession.
- The majority of the profession must accept the solution.

**Solution One: Change the Title to Better Suit the Profession**

There are two additional criteria by which to assess this solution. They are 1) it has to be possible to change the title and 2) there have to be alternative titles available. The discussion will begin with these two criteria. First, it is possible to change our title. It will take time and cost money, but it is possible. Secondly, there are alternative titles available. These include, but are not limited to:

- Certified Sports Medicine Practitioner
- Certified Athletic Rehabilitation Specialist
- Certified Athletic Therapist
- Certified Sport Therapist

However, these are the four most popular alternatives according to the survey and literature, and will be the titles evaluated in this report.
Certified Sports Medicine Practitioner

- This title will better suit the profession because it most accurately describes the profession and there is a high level of respect associated with the term sports medicine. Sports medicine is defined by the American College of Sports Medicine as a multiple disciplinary term that includes the physiological, biomechanical, psychological, and pathological phenomena associated with exercise and sports. It is most commonly understood as an umbrella term that includes disciplines such as biomechanics, exercise physiology, the practice of medicine relative to the athlete, sports nutrition, and sport psychology\(^1\). All of these disciplines are part of an athletic trainer’s responsibilities\(^3\) as defined by the National Athletic Trainers’ Association Professional Education Committee in Competencies in Athletic Training.

- This solution will have a positive effect on the profession for multiple reasons. First, it better describes the profession and will consequently increase public awareness. Additionally, it sounds more professional and will carry a great amount of respect due to the term sports medicine. Moreover, it eliminates the words athletic and training. This is important because it eliminates the negative connotation of academic inferiority that the word athletic carries from the title. It is also important because many commonly shorten the title athletic trainer to “trainer” and this can be
Athletic Training: A Change of Title is in Order

mistaken as anything from boxing trainer to pigeon trainer\textsuperscript{5,7}. Eliminating the word trainer rectifies this situation.

- According to the survey results and literature the majority of the profession does accept this title.

- **Certified Athletic Rehabilitation Specialist**
  - *This solution will better suit the profession* because it describes the profession. However, it only describes one aspect of the profession\textsuperscript{3}.
  - *The solution will have a positive effect on the profession* because it will increase public awareness by describing the position. It also eliminates the word trainer, which benefits the profession because of the reasons listed under the previous title. However, the word athletic, which carries a negative connotation, is still present.
  - According to the survey results and literature, the majority of the profession will not accept this solution.

- **Certified Athletic Therapist**
  - *This solution will better suit the profession* because it introduces the word therapist, which may draw an inference that we are similar to physical therapists by the public.
  - *This solution will have a positive effect on the profession* because of the possible association with physical therapy by the public. Additionally, this would be the most cost effective solution because the profession would not have to change its initials or logo (i.e. National Athletic
Therapists’ Association)⁴,⁶. However, this title still contains the word athletic.

- According to the survey results and literature, the majority of the profession will not accept this solution.

- Certified Sport Therapist

  - This solution will better suit the profession because, as with the previous title, it contains the word therapist.

  - This solution will have a positive effect on the profession because of the possible association with physical therapy by the public. However, the word sport is closely related to the athletics and may carry the same negative stigma.

  - According to the survey results and literature, the majority of the profession will not accept this solution

Solution Two: Do Not Change the Title and Take a Proactive Stance in Educating the Public About the Athletic Training Profession

This solution entails the National Athletic Trainers’ Association sponsoring national awareness campaigns in cooperation with regional and state athletic trainers’ associations. These campaigns should pay close attention to addressing the public as well as legislators, coaches, and administrators because these are the people that directly affect the profession⁶. It will only be successful if everyone involved puts forth an immense effort. These campaigns must make athletic training as well known as other allied health professions such as cardiac rehabilitation and physical therapy.
This solution will better suit the profession because it will educate the public and persons that directly affect and are currently ignorant regarding athletic training. Additionally, it will foster pride for the title athletic training within the profession. This solution will have a positive effect on the profession because of the effects of educating the people that have a direct impact on the profession. These effects could include an increase in respect, salaries, positions, and grants. According to the survey results and literature, the majority of the profession will not accept this solution.

Solution Three: Maintain the Status Quo

This solution will not better suit the profession because of the reasons stated in the introduction of this report. This solution will not have a positive effect on the profession because of the effects, as stated in the introduction, of leaving the name unchanged or not educating the people that have a direct impact on the profession. According to the survey results and literature, the majority of the profession will not accept this solution.

Recommendation

The best solution becomes obvious by evaluating the possibilities against the criteria. Although a few of the possible solutions would improve the current situation, it is clear that only one meets all of the criteria. It is my recommendation that the profession of
athletic training should change its title from Certified Athletic Trainer to Certified Sports Medicine Practitioner. This title better describes the profession and carries a high level of respect because of the term sports medicine. Additionally, it eliminates the word athletic, which is important because it eradicates the stigma of academic inferiority. It also eliminates the word trainer. This is important for two reasons: 1) we do not train anything and 2) the title could no longer be shortened to trainer, which could refer to a variety of professions including: fitness trainer, horse trainer, boxing trainer, and pigeon trainer. The combination of these advancements will contribute to an increase in respect, salaries, positions, and grants.

**Conclusion**

The title Certified Athletic Trainer does not adequately suit and also hinders the profession because it no longer represents the current professional activities of the group. The profession, whose past primary purpose was physical conditioning of athletes, has developed into a highly skilled allied health profession that is recognized by the American Medical Association. If the title remains unchanged, salaries will remain low, hours will remain long, positions will be limited, and research grants will be scarce.

The information gathered through research provides evidence that enables the possible solutions to be evaluated against the set criteria. By doing this, it becomes evident that the most viable solution is to change the title Certified Athletic Trainer to Certified Sports Medicine Practitioner. This solution satisfies all of the defined criteria and will have the biggest impact in advancing the profession.
In closing, I would like to express that my sincerest wish is to assist in advancing the profession. I feel that the findings of this report are significant and should be taken seriously. The time to act is upon us.
Athletic Training: A Change of Title is in Order

Works Cited


Appendix A

Should Athletic Trainers Change Their Title?  
A Survey
Appendix A

Should Athletic Trainers Change Their Title?
A Survey

1) I am currently a:(check all that apply)
   - Certified Athletic Trainer ___
   - Undergraduate Athletic Training Student ___
   - Graduate Athletic Training Student ___
   - NATABOC Eligible ___
   - Faculty ___
   - Clinical ___
   - Clinical ___

I am employed by:
   - Clinic ___
   - High School ___
   - University ___
   - Industrial ___
   - Other ____________________
   - Other ____________________

2) My current age is between: 18 – 25 years ___
   26 – 35 years ___
   35+ years ___

3) Do you feel that the title Athletic Trainer adequately suits our profession? Yes ___
   No ___

4) Do you feel that our title should be changed to better suit our profession? Yes ___
   No ___

5) If you chose yes for question 4, what title do you feel would best suit our profession?
   a) Certified Athletic Therapist ___
   b) Sports Medicine Specialist ___
   c) Certified Sport Therapist ___
   d) Athletic Rehabilitation Specialist ___
   e) Other ______________________________________________________

6) Explain why or why you don’t feel that our title should be changed? Also, explain your choice if you answered #5. (use back of paper if you need more space)
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

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Do You Know What an Athletic Trainer Is?
A Survey
Appendix B

Do You Know What An Athletic Trainer Is?
A Survey

1) I am: Male _____ Female _____

2) My current age is between: 18 – 25 years ____ 26 – 35 years ____ 35+ years ____

3) Have you ever been involved with organized athletics at the high school level or higher?
   Yes ____ No ____ (If No, Skip to # 6 now)

4) What sport(s) were you involved with? _______________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________

5) What was your role with the above sports? (Ex – coach, player, manager, etc.)
   _______________________________________________________________________

6) What do you think an Athletic Trainer is? _____________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________

7) List four responsibilities of an Athletic Trainer.
   1) _______________________________________________________________________
   2) _______________________________________________________________________
   3) _______________________________________________________________________
   4) _______________________________________________________________________