



Athletic Trainers in Occupational Health Caring for Industrial Athletes

By Tal Amasay and Kristin Sitte

In the occupational health setting, athletic trainers develop and manage programs designed to keep employees working at full capacity, improving company productivity, and even helping reduce healthcare and insurance costs. The occupational athletic trainer is knowledgeable in the design, implementation, and measurement of injury prevention, injury reduction, and return to work programs.

You can find athletic trainers (ATs) in a variety of settings working with physically active individuals. However, what is an athletic trainer?

According to the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA), ATs are "healthcare professionals who collaborate with physicians to provide preventative services, emergency care, clinical diagnosis, therapeutic intervention, and rehabilitation of injuries and medical conditions." To become a certified athletic trainer, the individual needs to complete a bachelor's degree from an accredited athletic training undergraduate program and pass the Board of Certification Exam. As of December 2015, NATA has 35,574 certified members. The three highest percentage job placements include colleges and universities (23.92%), secondary schools (23.67%), and clinics (16.26%). Additional job settings for ATs include professional

sports, military, and hospitals, as well as occupational settings. While only a small percentage of ATs work in the occupational setting, ATs are capable of positively impacting companies through improving productivity and increasing employee and employer satisfaction, while reducing injury rates, healthcare costs, workers' compensation claims, and missed work days.

Injuries in the workplace are inevitable. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, private industries reported almost three million nonfatal injuries and illnesses among employees in 2014. These injuries and illnesses sustained in the workplace, such as concussions or musculoskeletal disorders, have the potential to result in missed workdays for employees,

negatively affecting a company's productivity and profitability. Specifically, in 2014, more than 300,000 musculoskeletal injuries were reported within private industries, and the average missed workdays were nine.

ATs are equipped with the skills to manage these common injuries in the workplace using prevention programs, rehabilitation plans, education programs, movement evaluations, emergency response, and first aid expertise, as well as assist with paperwork, referrals, physician communication, and insurance. The implementation of these techniques results in the reduction of injury and injury severity, health care costs, workers' compensation claims, and missed workdays. A national survey conducted by NATA of industrial companies who employ athletic trainers identified a reduction greater than 25% in workers' compensation claims for musculoskeletal disorders. Half of the companies surveyed reported a decrease of at least 50% in work related injuries among employees. Not only are the numbers of injuries sustained in the workplace minimized through employing an athletic trainer, but also the severity of injuries sustained decreased by 25% among 94% of the industrial companies surveyed.

When injuries do occur, the presence of ATs allows employees to be progressed back into the demands of work through return-to-work programs, safely and effectively. Approximately 50% of companies that provide an on-site physical rehabilitation program showed a 50% decrease in healthcare costs. The positive impact that ATs have on industrial companies is evident through a 100% favorable return-on-investment (ROI) from companies employing ATs. More than 80% of companies indicated an ROI of at least \$3 per \$1 invested, with 30% of companies reporting an ROI of \$7. While the number of ATs in the occupational setting is minimal when compared to other settings, the importance of an athletic trainer is just as crucial.

Even though the field of athletic training is accepted and relatively well known throughout the United States, it is not as understood in other areas of the world. The mistake of relating athletic trainers to personal trainers or physical therapists still occurs. Education of employers, legislators, and third-party investors who work in the occupational field is essential to increasing the presence of athletic trainers in different occupational settings. It should be the same mind-set as that of general managers of professional teams trying to protect their investment, the professional athlete, through preventative exercise, acute response, and rehabilitation programs. Hence, athletic trainers' knowledge and skill set will allow companies to protect their investment, the employees. The management of companies and organizations must realize the importance of recognizing employees as occupational athletes. Therefore, industries need to ask themselves if utilizing an athletic trainer would be beneficial for their company. Do companies want to protect their investment? ◀

Reference: National Athletic Trainers' Association

Commentary on Athletic Trainers in the Occupational Setting by Adam Artel, DPT, CKTP, CEES, Cert. DN

Athletic trainers offer a great deal of value for employers. Their knowledge of musculoskeletal injuries and injury recovery strategies works nicely with acute patients. Everyone can think about an athletic trainer running out onto the field of play to take care of the injured athlete. The comparison can be said within employers, but in this case, the athlete is one of your employees. Quickly assessing the injury severity, how to decrease that initial response to pain, and communicating with those involved replicate the athletic world. Their knowledge of injury triage fits nicely with preventing OSHA recordability, and their knowledge of head injuries to rule in and out concussions is above many other medical professionals. Athletic trainers also have a higher background in injury prevention than many other medical professionals. Creating programs for departments on best static or dynamic stretching comes very easy. Thoughts on how to strengthen the worker and promote overall health are engrained into their schooling.

The major drawback of using athletic trainers within employers is founded on the basis of the company representative's idea of who is the best medical professional within employers. It can be enticing to get a doctor of physical therapy or someone with a different master's degree. We believe the skill of the individual far outweighs the degree in which they achieve. Great athletic trainers can be as much an asset to a company compared to any other medical professional. Having a high-functioning on-site program is by far a better indicator of success, and athletic trainers fit within that model.



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