

Preparing for the Future: The Early History of Athletic Training Certification, submitted by Paula G. Sammarone, M.A., A.T., C.

As a profession grows and changes, its leaders often are faced with making crucial decisions which will guide the profession into the future. In the event of changes in the health care system that may affect Athletic Training, it is important that Athletic Trainers begin to examine who we are, what we do, and how we got to this point in our evolution. By gaining insight into this history, we can better understand the past and plan for the future of our profession. An area of particular interest to the athletic training population is the preparation and ultimate admittance of entry-level practitioners into the profession of Athletic Training.

In 1959, there was an outcry by the practicing Athletic Trainers for more specific standards of practice and education for entering professionals. The NATA Board of Directors, then chaired by A. C. Gwyne from West Virginia University, approved and adopted an educational program presented to them by the Committee for Professional Advancement which provided guidelines to raise the standard of practice of the athletic training profession. Their program included four criteria - 1) Athletic trainers should receive guidance from the medical profession and the NATA; 2) Athletic Trainers should be given unqualified use of existing physical education and physical therapy facilities; 3) the Athletic Trainer should act as a liaison with those in physical education and student health; and 4) all Athletic Trainers should have a major study area in physical education, a minor in a restricted area, and acquire the required courses for teaching licenses in their respective states.(O'Shea, 1979)

In line with the Professional Advancement Committee's criteria to receive guidance from the medical profession, it was suggested by the American Medical Association (AMA) during the early 1960s that all members of a para-medical profession, such as Athletic Training, should have some form of certification to ensure the quality of preparation of the professional. In reaction to this suggestion, all active members of the NATA were certified by the Association in 1965 without examination or other provisions. Although the NATA had followed the directive of the AMA, the Board of Directors realized that this method of certification would prove inadequate in the future and should be revised.(O'Shea, 1979)

In an effort to provide the athletic training community with a more realistic method for developing professional standards and professional certification, then NATA Executive Director William "Pinky" Newell, Head Athletic Trainer at Purdue University, became engaged in ongoing conversations with Mr. Lindsay McLean, P.T., A.T.,C.; then Head Athletic Trainer at the University of Michigan; regarding the efficacy of such certification procedures and the concerns as to the development of a valid and applicable standard of practice for the athletic training professional. These conversations prompted Mr. McLean, and many other professionals, to begin questioning the concept of evaluating the competency of Athletic Trainers and the determination of how the NATA, and their certification of Athletic Trainers, could be recognized by the American Medical Association.(McLean, 1993)

Early in 1967, William "Pinky" Newell had stepped down from his position as Executive Director of the NATA and had assumed the role of Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on Professional Advancement. It was this committee's charge to develop

objectives for the NATA to become an accredited medical society.(McLean, 1993)
Due to this committee's efforts, in June 1967 the "AMA recognized the role of the professionally prepared Athletic Trainer as part of a team responsible for the health care of the athlete. The NATA was furthermore commended by the AMA for its efforts to upgrade their professional standards through approved preparation and continuing education."(O'Shea, 1979) With the attainment of this recognition, the committee was disbanded, as all charges had been determined to be complete.

During the year which ensued, the Ad Hoc Committee on Professional Advancement was reconvened and restructured into a standing NATA committee, the Professional Advancement Committee, which was chaired, again, by Mr. Newell from Purdue University. Under his direction, two subcommittees were formed - the Sub-Committee on Certification by Examination, chaired by Mr. Lindsay McLean; and the Sub-Committee on Curriculum and Education Requirements, chaired by Sayers "Bud" Miller.(McLean, 1993)

Late in 1968, the Sub-Committee on Certification by Examination, which included Linc Kimura from the San Francisco 49ers, Ken Rawlinson from the University of Oklahoma, Dave Wike from Miami University, and George Sullivan from the University of Nebraska; distributed a survey to the NATA membership which was designed to gain information which would "upgrade the professional preparation of new membership applicants only...and (this certification exam would) support and augment the development of athletic training curriculums but would be open to applicants with adequate academic preparation from other institutions also who, otherwise (met) present association membership criteria."(Professional Advancement

Committee, 1968) At this time, neither the survey, nor the cover letter, requested information regarding criteria for eligibility to become a candidate for the examination (including clinical experience/apprenticeship requirements); the results of this survey were gathered by February 28, 1968, tabulated, and the Committee reconvened for a meeting in May 1969 in preparation for their first meeting with a professional testing service (Professional Examination Service of the American Social Health Association [PES]) in August 1969.

It was in the Sub-Committee's minutes from the August 12th and 13th, 1969 meeting, held in conjunction with PES in New York City, that the first mention of clinical experience hour requirements were brought to light. It was the consensus of the Committee comprised of Mr. Lindsay McLean, Mr. George Sullivan of the University of Nebraska, Dr. James Feurig, Team Physician at Michigan State University; Sayers "Bud" Miller of the University of Washington; Joe Altott of Columbia University; and Mr. Chris Patrick of the University of Florida that "estimated that it may take a number of years to develop a sufficient number of educational programs to qualify Athletic Trainers (as professionals in the field of Athletic Training), and this (was) one of the reasons for the establishment of the certification program. The NATA, therefore set four requirements for eligibility to take the certification examination. These criteria included 1) completion of an Approved Athletic Training curriculum, or 2) apprenticeship under an active Athletic Trainer for four years, or 3) registration as a physical therapist with a minor degree in physical education and an apprenticeship of less than four years, or 4) experience as an active Athletic Trainer for a certain number of years."(Professional Advancement Committee, 1969) (Table 1)

The educational theories which supported the establishment of these criteria never were considered formally; however, in retrospect, there were and are a number of theories of cognitive learning which do support the adoption of these standards.

With much prompting from the Board of Directors, chaired by Dr. Joe Gieck of the University of Virginia, the first examinations were written, developed, and administered over the course of the next year and one half. In a report by the Subcommittee, now officially titled the NATA Board of Certification - Division of Professional Advancement, to the NATA Board of Directors in June 1972, the results of the first year's examinations included thirty-nine (39) of a total of sixty (60) applicants, a passing average of 85%, had passed the examinations administered during the first year trial. When those candidates were delineated by certification category, the results were as follows - **Section I** (5 years experience), 18 passing; **Section II** (curriculum + 2 years experience), 2; **Section III** (Physical Therapy + 2 years experience), 5; and **Section IV** (Apprenticeship - 1800 hours), 14.

During the next twenty years, the criteria for eligibility to be considered as a candidate for the national examination have been modified, consolidated, and some revoked. The current members of the NATA Board of Certification (NATA-BOC) took the initiative in 1993, in a cooperative effort with the NATA Professional Education Committee (NATA-PEC) and selected members of the profession, to begin to scientifically and critically study the criteria and requirements of entry-level Athletic Trainers and their supervising Athletic Trainers. This cooperative group, the Task Force on Certification Standards, hopes to present some initial findings to the

membership at the national meeting in June; however, their studies will continue over the next several years.

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