

The Role of Athletic Trainers in the Occupational and Industrial Work Setting

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Received date: January 28, 2016; Accepted date: January 29, 2016; Published date: January 30, 2016

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Description

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 "health care professionals who collaborate with physicians to provide preventative services, emergency care, clinical diagnosis, therapeutic intervention and rehabilitation of injuries and medical conditions" [1]. 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 [1]. As of December 2015, the 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. In 2015, the occupational job setting accounted for only 1.33% of the 35,574 NATA members [2]. While only a small percentage of ATs work in this setting, ATs are capable of positively impacting companies through improving productivity and increasing employee and employer satisfaction, while reducing injury rates, health care costs, workers' compensation claims, and missed work days [3].

Injuries in the workplace are inevitable. According to the Bureau of Labour Statistics, private industries reported almost three million nonfatal injuries and illnesses among employees in 2014 [4]. These injuries and illnesses sustained in the workplace, such as concussion 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 was nine [4]. 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 [3]. 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 the 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 health care costs [3]. 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 [5].

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 [6]. 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?

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