Another fall sports season is underway, and with that brings an increased chance for sport-related concussions. As athletic trainers, we are on the frontline in the prevention, recognition, and treatment of sport-related concussions. Our extensive training and educational background provide us with a unique set of medical skills necessary to handle these challenging injuries. It is important that we do not lose sight of the unique qualities and skills that we possess as athletic trainers and sport health care providers.

Why do I point this out? Mainstream media in the United States is obsessed with issues surrounding sport-related concussions. Much of this attention has been sparked by autopsy evidence supporting cause of death due to chronic traumatic encephalopathy in the brains of deceased former NFL football players.

Although the media has helped to shed light on the need for appropriate medical coverage and care, including calls for certified athletic trainers, it has also empowered state legislators to get involved and pursue legislation to protect and insure player safety. Although this would seem like a worthwhile and noble cause, my fear is that many legislative acts may miss the point with regard to how sport-related concussions should be managed without encouraging participation from a wide range of experts (including certified athletic trainers).

In January 2010, a Youth Sport Safety Summit was convened by the National Athletic Trainers’ Association. Sport safety experts representing 30 organizations discussed issues related to sport safety, including sport-related concussions. This summit is an excellent example of how bringing together many voices can raise awareness to important sport-safety concerns and ensure that every voice is heard.

Athletic trainers are qualified health care professionals capable of expressing to legislators the unique skill set available to them in handling all facets of sport-related concussion care. Therefore, it is incumbent on those in our readership to become closely aligned with any respective state legislative efforts being considered for sport-related concussions (and other sport safety issues).

The time to act is now. We must be proactive in our efforts to influence legislation so that the voices...
of athletic trainers and other sports health care professionals are heard and that our unique skill set in handling sport-related concussions is recognized. My apprehension is that if we do not make our voices heard, well-intentioned legislative efforts may not be suitable to us as athletic training professionals, nor the profession of athletic training.

Stay informed and check on the legislation regarding sport-related concussion and other sport safety issues by logging on to the National Athletic Trainers’ Association’s Web site (http://www.nata.org/government-affairs-advocacy). Additional information can be found at the Youth Sport Safety Alliance Web site (http://www.youthsportssafetyalliance.org/).

Stand up and be heard!

The author has no financial or proprietary interest in the materials presented herein.

doi:10.3928/19425864-20100827-01