At last count, 47 of 50 states in the United States had some form of regulation governing the practice of athletic training. For athletic trainers, having knowledge and staying informed about the laws, rules, and regulations governing the practice of athletic training in the states where they work is crucial. With the recent political uneasiness sweeping the nation, legislative bodies governing our states are more likely to examine all laws in an attempt to become more fiscally prudent and efficient. Laws governing the practice of athletic training are no exception.

My students recently brought to my attention 2 state practice acts under fire here in the eastern part of the country, specifically in New Hampshire and New Jersey. In New Hampshire, the House of Representatives has introduced legislation (House Bill 446) “Repealing the Authority for Regulation of Certain Professional Occupations.” In a move to deregulate and lessen government intrusion on professions such as barbers and forest rangers, it appears that athletic trainers (true allied health professionals) have been lumped in with these other nonmedical professions. This bill has serious implications for athletic trainers in New Hampshire, and if passed could result in the elimination of licensing in that state—the fallout from which would be extremely devastating. The need for athletic trainers in New Hampshire and throughout the United States to make sure their voices are heard with regard to this legislative act is critical. The consequences of such legislation could be felt nationwide.

In New Jersey, the issue centers on revisions to the Athletic Trainer Licensure Act and a new set of proposed athletic training rules and regulations. Specifically, one provision in the proposed set of changes will impose additional and stricter supervision requirements (eg, a physician examination and referral is required before an athletic trainer may treat an athlete) based solely on location of practice setting (eg, clinic, school, professional sports venue, summer camp). As currently written, the practice act states that athletic trainers have a legal obligation to:

- immediately refer an athlete to an appropriate health care professional licensed in the state if the athletic trainer has reasonable cause to believe that the athletic training is contraindicated or symptoms or conditions are present that require services outside the scope of the athletic trainer’s practice.

The athletic trainers in New Jersey should apply this to any setting in
which they practice. Of real concern is that the new law may prohibit athletic trainers from working in youth sports, sport camps, tournaments, and amateur athletic programs because injured athletes will not have received a “referral from a physician who has physically examined the athlete.” An interesting quandary indeed!

The reason I bring up these 2 examples concerning proposed legislative changes is that they are a reminder of the need for certified athletic trainers (young and old, novice to experienced) to stay tuned to the practice acts that govern their licensure in the states in which they practice. It will be important now that grassroots efforts, on the part of the certified athletic trainers in both states mentioned here, take swift and appropriate action so their voices are heard and that the legislative efforts do not negatively affect their own practice settings and employment status. For those who wait, it may be too late—the time to act is now!

REFERENCES

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