Changes in Key Athletic Training Leadership Positions Will Shape the Future of the Profession

The winds of change are blowing across the landscape of athletic training leadership. Key leaders in the profession are stepping aside, and those entrusted to lead us strongly and decisively into the future have assumed (or will soon assume) the reins of 4 very important positions in the leadership of the athletic training profession. Jim Thornton capably assumed the role of President of the National Athletic Trainers’ Association (NATA) at the national meeting in June 2012 after Marge Albohm’s terrific run as president came to a close. The cover of this month’s NATA News indicates that Eve Becker-Doyle will step aside as the Executive Director of the NATA beginning January 1, 2013.

In addition, key leadership roles in The Commission on the Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE) and the Board of Certification (BOC) are also changing hands. Walt Disney is attributed as saying, “change is inevitable, growth is optional.” There is much wisdom to be gleaned from this quote—now more than ever—for the profession of athletic training. In my opinion, we are at a crossroads of growth and maturity as we look to strengthen our position in the allied health arena. As a profession, we cannot afford to stagnate or not take advantage of the tremendous opportunities that are ahead of us in a vastly changed health care environment.

I’m comforted by the fact that as more and more high schools throughout the United States have some level of athletic training coverage (I’ll leave that topic for another editorial), certified athletic trainers are being recognized and spoken of in high regard among administrators, coaches, parents, and community leaders as true allied health professionals. It is refreshing not to hear conversations about athletic trainers at local high school competitions and feel the need to defend their worth or answer questions such as “what is an athletic trainer?”

Getting back to leadership changes, let me first begin at the NATA level. As a member of NATA District II, I am certainly aware of the strong leadership qualities of Jim Thornton, who represented our constituency so admirably for many years prior to assuming the role of president of the NATA in June 2012. His understanding of the profession, passion for his job as an athletic trainer, and vision for the future are all admirable traits as he accepted the leadership responsibilities of the NATA. When asked why he wanted to be the next president of the NATA, his response was forthright and honest: “Outcomes research, legislation at the state and federal level, jobs, in-
creases in salaries, better hours and all of the other things that our members need to be successful and have meaningful lives with their families has to start with all of us.” I’m sure he did not anticipate that he would also be involved in perhaps the most influential hire our profession has ever faced—that of a replacement for Eve Becker-Doyle as Executive Director of the NATA.

As Executive Director of the NATA for the past 20 years, Eve has led the profession through some very important times and solidified the day-to-day operation of the NATA and its support of the 30,000+ members—no easy task, to say the least! We all knew Eve could not stay in this position forever, so now as 2013 gets underway, the NATA Board of Directors, along with President Thornton, must seek out another true leader with the diplomatic skills and management tools necessary to guide the athletic training profession forward and solidify its status among health care professions not only nationally but also internationally. I envision that the next director will have to be a strong advocate of our profession (perhaps an athletic trainer himself or herself) with a proven record in the health care industry and a management style that is inclusive, not divisive. Goodness knows we see enough divisiveness among American politicians!

I would also like to say a few words about other important leadership positions that will affect 2 very important liaison agencies in support of the NATA: (1) the BOC and (2) the CAATE. The mission of the BOC is to provide exceptional credentialing programs for health care professionals to ensure protection of the public. As Pete Koehneke steps away from the BOC Board of Directors and the role of President, Dr. Susan McGowan will step into his shoes—big shoes to fill, indeed! During Pete’s tenure as president and under the continuous stewardship of Executive Director, Denise Fandel, the BOC has fashioned itself into a very efficient and strong association, working to credential entry-level athletic trainers and ensure its members stay current by providing for and monitoring continuing education activities. Although the BOC’s role in the credentialing process is well known, perhaps its most influential role is to promote and support reliance on its credentials by state regulatory bodies.

As I see it, this reliance is critical to the expanding role and responsibilities of athletic trainers practicing in the United States and its territories. Although the athletic training profession is certainly far better off today than it was just 10 years ago, with regard to state regulatory acts making it easier for athletic trainers to practice their profession legally and within the scope of the law, there are still a few pockets of resistance that must be overcome. Although some states have regulation of athletic training, in my eyes the gold standard has to be licensure. Although I do not know Dr. McGowan, I am confident that she, too, has her sights set on ensuring that all states have effective and fair laws in place for athletic trainers to perform their jobs safely and effectively to protect physically active individuals.

The mission of the CAATE is to provide comprehensive accreditation services to institutions that offer athletic training degree programs and to verify that all CAATE-accredited programs meet the acceptable educational standards for professional (entry-level) athletic training education. As an athletic training educator myself, I see the next 10 years as a critical time for the educational mission of the profession. Although the commissioners of the CAATE are in place, and they are a very able group indeed, they lack an executive director. As an organization that relies solely on volunteers (1 office staff employee is the exception), having an executive director in place to guide the association at such a pivotal time in its existence is crucial. I’ve been intrigued by the fact that this position has been vacant for more than a year now; however, as of this writing and on the heels of the Athletic Training Educators’ Conference, it is apparent that progress is being made. Perhaps by the time the NATA meeting in Las Vegas rolls around in June 2013, we’ll have a new leader of CAATE in place.

Collectively, athletic trainers are a resilient bunch of dedicated health care professionals. Many of the individuals mentioned in this editorial have dedicated immeasurable time and energy for the betterment of the membership and will serve (or continue to serve) as able leaders who will help to move the profession forward. I hope the same can be said of whomever fills those 2 currently vacant executive director positions (NATA and CAATE). As Winston Churchill is quoted as saying, “To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often.”

REFERENCES


The author has no financial or proprietary interest in the materials presented herein. doi:10.3928/19425864-20130222-10