The Winds of Change Are Blowing

A flexible 5-week winter term at the University of Delaware enables me to travel often during the month of January and into early February. This year has been no exception, as I’ve had opportunities to travel to Mashantucket, Connecticut, for the Eastern Athletic Trainers’ Association meeting; to Dallas, Texas, for some National Athletic Trainers’ Association (NATA) committee meetings; and to Atlanta, Georgia, for the Southeast Athletic Trainers’ Association Student Symposium.

Each stop along the way provided me with the opportunity to see old friends, former students, and educational and clinical colleagues and to meet new acquaintances. Conversations this year have taken on a drift of change and transformation, eerily reminiscent of the late 1990s, when the NATA’s Education Task Force was phasing out the internship route to certification. The internship route was officially terminated on January 1, 2004. Winston Churchill once said, “To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often.” Needless to say, the NATA heeds this wise advice frequently!

So what’s all this change about? Perhaps the issue that garnered the greatest chatter was the recommendation set forth in a white paper titled Professional Education in Athletic Training, written by the Executive Committee on Education (ECE) and submitted to the NATA’s Board of Directors in December 2013. Based on the evidence gathered by a cadre of constituent groups and NATA members, it was concluded that professional education in athletic training, and thus entry into the profession, should occur at the master’s degree level, essentially saying to the more than 300 baccalaureate-level institutions across the United States that if you want to stay in the business of athletic training education, you must do so at the master’s level. I suppose this is easier said than done!

As a seasoned educator with more than 30 years of experience in higher education, all of which involved athletic training education, I was left pondering whether this change will be good for the profession and if it will move us forward in the right direction. A traditionalist at heart, change has always been difficult for me: I am a true creature of habit. I suppose initially, I felt reluctant, much like I did when the recommendation was made to phase out the internship route to certification (I was certified in 1984 via this route!) and create the more than 300 undergraduate educational programs that we now have in place to educate future athletic trainers.
However, as the years have worn on, I see that the change was necessary and has served its purpose. I read with keen interest an editorial written in the Your Voice column of the August/September 2013 issue of the NATA News by my good friend and colleague Dr. Bill Prenitce, who wisely stated that he was not convinced that it was in the best interest of the athletic training profession to transition to the entry-level master’s degree without serious input from all NATA members and thorough examination of the evidence to support such a move.1

Less than 3 months after that column was published, the ECE made their recommendations. Was this a sufficient amount of time for the working group to gather all the information necessary to make an informed decision? You be the judge! Nonetheless, it appears that this change will happen, and therefore, when asked my thoughts and feelings on the issue, I respond by saying, “It is what it is, and those resistant to the change will be left behind.” I hope that it will turn out to be a benefit for the profession—but only time will tell.

Second, conversation surrounding the Board of Certification’s (BOC’s) new continuing education (CE) requirement involving evidence-based practice (EBP) has increased. Beginning January 1, 2014, athletic trainers must complete 10 CE units in the EBP category every 2-year certification cycle. Surely no novice to EBP, I have on several occasions supported and called for the athletic training profession to embrace this change, both as a proven mode of garnering positive publicity for all that we do as health care professionals and as one of the most important steps we can take to ensure our legitimacy as a profession. Therefore, I was somewhat surprised by the commotion raised and the stirring of anxiety this new and expected requirement has brought forth. It has been more than 10 years now since the NATA embraced the concept of EBP, and it is now commonplace in our educational curricula and clinical practice. Why, then, are the masses surprised by this new BOC CE requirement? Change can bring out the best and worst in all of us! This is one requirement you cannot pass on, so embrace it and move on—EBP will make us better sports health care professionals in the long run!

Finally, I want to say a few words concerning the change in the NATA’s Texas headquarters. During my visit there a few weeks ago, our committee had the dubious distinction of holding the last official meetings in the old 2952 Stemmons Freeway NATA headquarters building. For 26 years, NATA called the building home, but its time had passed—not only was it on a busy highway, but its location was also less than desirable because of a rise in crime. As the winds of change are blowing all around the NATA, it seems only fitting that the profession get a new home. Our tour of the new facility revealed a comfortable and safe environment that will accommodate the needs of all staff members. Best of luck to all!

My 30 years as a certified athletic trainer have provided me with a much greater understanding of the need to be flexible. Changes sweeping through the profession at this juncture are necessary and will move it forward, most likely with a few bumps along the way and some bruised egos left behind. However, I am confident that as the sun sets on a historic chapter of the athletic training profession and a new day dawns, all athletic trainers will be better off moving forward. Change you can bet on!

REFERENCE

1. Is a transition to the entry-level master’s degree really the best choice for the profession? NATA News. August/September 2013:10-11.

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