It has been a privilege to serve as a guest editor for this special issue on mental health for Athletic Training & Sports Health Care. Being at least a little self-aware, I ask myself the obvious question: What qualifies me to do this? I am not an athletic trainer or a sports medicine physician, nor am I a licensed mental health clinician. However, I am a social scientist with a sport and exercise psychology background that aids me in understanding athlete mental health outcomes.

Much of my career has focused on outcomes such as burnout and psychological stress, but I have also studied topics such as interpersonal relationships, depression, and anxiety in current and former athlete populations. Through my work, I have gotten to know clinicians who have shared their knowledge and expertise from the clinical world. Such conversations have aided my research tremendously. With this issue, I hope to turn the tables a bit and share some of the most contemporary research and theory on the mental health of athletes with the readership of this journal. I cannot thank Tom Kaminski, the editor of Athletic Training & Sports Health Care, enough for this opportunity. My gratitude also goes out to Luzita Vela, my co-editor for this special issue, for her tireless efforts and thoughtful guidance as we put this together. With that said, let’s talk science.

Psychological health and well-being has always been an important topic to the individual experiencing the issue (eg, anxiety, depression, and burnout), but is growing in contemporary interest as an area of research and clinical practice within the athletic realm. We often think of the importance of outcomes such as anxiety and depression of currently competing athletes for reasons of both performance and health and well-being. However, it also represents an important topic for the mental and physical wellness of athletes across their lifespans (ie, transition to retirement or life after sport). Accordingly, providing effective care for an athlete’s mental health may have implications for mental health outcomes, symptom disclosure, and interface with the mental health care community beyond sport participation.

The biopsychosocial model\textsuperscript{1,2} of patient care is well positioned to aid sports medicine clinicians in effectively monitoring, diagnosing, and referring athletes for appropriate mental health treatment. In short, this model posits that injury involves a dualism between the physical and mental experiences of a patient. Specifically, psycho-
social variables are important determinants of injury susceptibility and severity and are imperative to the success of biological treatments. For example, the patient–clinician relationship (a psychosocial perception) is a key determinant of treatment success. Moreover, understanding athlete health outcomes involves careful understanding of the patient’s social network, family, community, and larger social spheres of influence.

Cumulatively, the biopsychosocial model represents a useful heuristic for those concerned with the psychosocial health of athletes via its inclusive focus on links among mental and physical health and its broad view on how the ecological social network that surrounds the individual (and his or her biological responses such as injury) contribute to injury and recovery. Guided by the biopsychosocial model, it is the role of the sports medicine team to foster an environment where athletes feel safe in sharing symptoms of mental health (eg, anxiety, depression, and burnout) so that the appropriate diagnostic and treatment decisions can be made. In some instances, this may mean that the athlete receives medication and/or therapeutic treatment from an appropriately licensed mental health clinician. In other instances, for issues such as burnout, which does not have clinical diagnostic criteria, appropriate physical and/or mental breaks from sport may be appropriate. Ultimately, the most effective mental health care for athletes should be patient-centered and within the scope of practice of all providers.

The development of an environment where the mental health of athletes is best supported requires a careful integration of a well-constructed team. This includes a sports medicine physician, athletic trainer, and sport psychologist with appropriate licensure to treat mental health issues. In many instances, a performance-oriented sport psychology consultant may aid in the identification of an athlete’s mental health issues but should not be involved in treatment. Communication among these individuals is key to the most efficient and effective best practices of mental health care for athletes. Additionally, a basic understanding of the research on major psychosocial health issues in sport, a key focus of this special issue, will aid clinicians in this important work.

Sport is a stressful environment not only for the athlete, but also for the athletic trainers and sports medicine clinicians who serve them. One cannot expect athletic trainers to focus only on the health and well-being of their patients without also caring for themselves. Thus, those within the sport environment should be equally concerned with the psychosocial outcomes of athletic trainers. These include experiences of work-related stress, burnout, and more optimal experiences such as work–life balance and quality of life. A focus on the health of the clinicians is important to their own well-being and provides an effective role model for symptom disclosure and health care use for the athletes that they serve: “You care about your mental health and wellness, I should, too.”

Consistent with the theme of an editorial, I suppose that I should offer some opinions or insights on the state of the research and care of mental health in sport. First, I think it is fair to say that we have come a long way in the past decade in terms of our interest and understanding of mental health in sport. Myriad recent statements by various sports medicine organizations have been published regarding the importance of mental health in athletes, which lend credence to this idea. These include statements and materials created by the National Athletic Trainers’ Association (NATA) and National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). For example, the NCAA’s Mind, Body and Sport: Understanding and Supporting Student-Athlete Mental Wellness and best practice mental health guidelines provide key suggestions on how to manage mental health in the competitive sport environment.

Despite this important progress, it can be difficult to make sense of such a large body of research and theory on mental health in sport. Based on my review of such work, I believe a few important key take-home messages include the following: (1) the biopsychosocial model is essential to inform best practices of athlete psychosocial health care; (2) communication is key to the integration of clinicians necessary to implement this model; (3) an increased general understanding of the research and practice guidelines for the mental health of athletes will aid sports medicine clinicians; (4) athletic trainers are front-line personnel for recognizing mental health issues in sport and must use evidence-based methods to screen and refer athletes with suspected mental health concerns; and (5) athletic trainers must monitor and optimize their own psychosocial health to be able to best aid the athletes they serve. We hope this
special issue aids in some way to address these key points.

I am extremely proud of this special issue. It showcases a variety of article types, including original research, literature reviews, and a mental health–focused case study. Athlete-focused topics include burnout, depression, concussion, and disclosure of mental health outcomes by athletes to key personnel. Additionally, we have included a literature review discussing the most up-to-date information on work–life balance for athletic trainers. This collection of authors includes leaders in their fields of study who have put their best foot forward in their contributions to this special issue. We thank them for their contributions and thank you for having an interest in mental health and wellness in sport.

Happy reading!

REFERENCES