Once certified as an athletic trainer, I looked forward to two conferences a year: the regional Eastern Athletic Trainers’ Association (EATA) convention and the National Athletic Trainers’ Association (NATA) annual meeting. Back then, hotel choices were few, you mailed in your registration form, and the meetings were small and informal.

Needless to say, times have changed. As the summer conference season approaches, many athletic trainers look forward to the time to congregate with their professional colleagues to swap stories on the past year, socialize, and embrace continuing education opportunities. Although the NATA Annual Meeting and Clinical Symposia has grown into an educational and social extravaganza, it does in fact cater to the many tastes and specialties that make up the profession of athletic training and, in my humble opinion, will remain the premier conference for athletic trainers around the world. However, it faces much stiffer competition from a variety of continuing education providers here at home and abroad.

Personally, the last year has been a whirlwind of professional travel both here in the United States and abroad. As the profession of athletic training continues to grow and mature, specialization has taken hold for many, including myself. This specialization has taken place whether you’re a practicing clinician, active researcher, or educator. Just this morning, I received an advertisement flyer for a surgical specialty course offered by the American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine (AOSSM). Most likely my name is found somewhere in their databases from a past conference that I attended, even though I’m the farthest thing from being an orthopedist!

In fact, by the time you read this editorial I will have traveled to and presented at two highly specialized conferences on the sport of soccer: the first being the jointly sponsored Head Injury in Soccer: From Science to the Field Summit in New York City and the second being the World Conference on Science and Soccer 5.0 in Rennes, France. This will be my third time at the latter meeting, which brings together clinicians, researchers, and coaches from around the world to grow the science behind the game and promote safe and enjoyable soccer participation. I also embrace my role as an ambassador for the profession of athletic training on this world platform and in spreading the mission of Athletic Training & Sports Health Care.
Although I never played soccer, I have coached (even secured a Class D license at one point) and have a profound research interest in soccer heading, subconcussive head impacts, and concussion in the sport. My research colleagues and I have collectively labeled ourselves as the “soccer nerds”!

To maintain professional credentialing, and in most cases licensure to practice as athletic trainers, continuing education must be documented and maintained. In fact, the Board of Certification (BOC), which serves as the credentialing agency for athletic trainers here in the United States and a few other countries worldwide, stipulates that athletic trainers must complete a predetermined number of continuing education units (CEUs) during the certification maintenance period. Athletic trainers certified in 2015 or before must complete 50 CEUs, which must include at least 10 Evidence Based Practice (EBP) CEUs. Thus, the driving force behind conference attendance is the desire to accrue the CEUs to maintain certification status and hold licensure. Unfortunately, most of the practicing athletic trainers, athletic training educators, and research colleagues I know do not have unlimited budgets that will allow them to hop around the region, country, and world to attend the overwhelming number of professional workshops and conferences that are available to them.

If I had to offer advice as to how one should go about choosing which meetings to attend, I would suggest that the NATA Annual Meeting and Clinical Symposia should serve as the foundational meeting that every athletic trainer should attend. A well-planned and professionally run event that caters to every need of the athletic training professional, the NATA convention is worth the money and time. Using this event as the cornerstone, I would suggest personal introspection in your professional life to examine areas of interest and growth and to set forth a plan to attend conferences and workshops that will serve to quench that desire.

Athletic training clinical sub-specialties have expanded greatly in the past 10 years, with athletic trainers branching out from the traditional clinic, collegiate, and high school settings to work in orthopedic practices, industrial settings, and military environments. There are many outstanding opportunities to advance your professional knowledge and clinical skill set by attending these educational enhancement activities. Additionally, educators, administrators, and researchers have a smorgasbord of professional development activities to satisfy their every desire; often those that do not cater specifically to athletic trainers are the ones that leave the most lasting impressions and educational gain.

The one benefit of having so many choices is that there is an ever-increasing number of these events now taking place at the regional and local level, allowing individuals to stretch their limited continuing education allocations. The BOC website serves as good starting point for athletic trainers and other sports health care professionals in search of CEU activities (http://www.bocatc.org).

As another school year comes to a close here at the University of Delaware and for many of our readers across the Unites States and abroad, I wish you the best in your travels along the summer conference circuit. And although the choices may be plentiful, the most important thing to remember is that you should choose conferences that will offer you the greatest of professional and personal benefit as you work to improve your standing as a health care professional and in the best interest of those that you serve. Good luck and have fun!

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