

## Are Certified Athletic Trainers Qualified to Use Therapeutic Modalities?

David O. Draper

It is apparent that certified athletic trainers are limited in their use of therapeutic modalities by some state practice acts. I am aware of some situations in which the athletic trainer is only permitted to prepare the patient for treatment (eg, apply electrodes, prepare an area for ultrasound treatment), but the physical therapist must physically turn on the machine and perform the treatment. In other states, the certified athletic trainer (ATC) who works in a clinic setting is considered to be on the same level as a physical therapist assistant or aide, and as such, might be limited in modality use. As a researcher of therapeutic modalities for more than a decade, it troubles me that the hands of ATCs are tied with respect to modality use.

My purpose in writing this editorial is to inform the public that ATCs are skilled in the use of therapeutic modalities. I will provide both entry-level and continuing education examples.

1. How are students of athletic training being educated and trained in the proper use of therapeutic modalities?

Students of athletic training are educated in programs accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP). In order to meet the standards of this accrediting agency, a student must complete a myriad of cognitive (22), psychomotor (10), and affective (5) domains dealing with therapeutic modalities. This is typically accomplished by completing at least one semester course on therapeutic modalities. In addition, students may receive basic instruction in the use of therapeutic modalities in their basic athletic training and rehabilitation courses.

Aside from the classroom experience, athletic training students are also provided an opportunity to use modalities on a daily basis during their year-round clinical practicums. This powerful model of education combines academics in the morning with clinical work in the afternoon and evening.

2. What does the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) offer to keep its ATCs current in the proper use of therapeutic modalities?

Certified athletic trainers are required to earn continuing education units (CEUs) to retain their certified status. A variety of continuing education opportunities exist in the area of therapeutic modalities.

*Educational sessions:* An entire educational session (3 hours) has been devoted to the use of therapeutic modalities at the last 4 NATA Annual Meetings and Clinical Symposia. Also, many 15-minute Free Communications research presentations and poster presentations on the topic of therapeutic modalities have been provided during the recent NATA annual meetings.

*Home study courses:* The NATA offers home study courses dealing with the latest techniques and research on therapeutic modalities.

*Professional journal:* The *Journal of Athletic Training* is the scholarly journal of the NATA. The Table demonstrates how the *Journal of Athletic Training* advances ATCs' understanding of therapeutic modalities in comparison with 2 other journals in related fields. The *Journal of Orthopaedic and Sports Physical Therapy* published 1 therapeutic modalities article every 4.7 issues; *Physical Therapy*, 1 such article every 6 issues; and the *Journal of Athletic Training*, 1.5 such articles per issue.

3. Are ATCs doing research? Certified athletic trainers were authors in 65 of the 80 articles (81%) appearing in the 3 journals.

In conclusion, ATCs play a key role in assisting their patients in recovery from injury. Certified athletic trainers are provided ample opportunity to learn about therapeutic modalities during their entry-level education. They are required to earn CEUs to retain their certification status. Certified athletic trainers are very active in clinical research on therapeutic modalities, and as

**Therapeutic Modality Articles in 42 Issues Each of 3 Journals**

Journal	No. of TM* Articles	No. of TM* Articles by ATC Authors	Subjects							
			Electric Stimulation	Ultrasound	Thermotherapy	Diathermy	Cryotherapy	Contrast Therapy	Massage	Magnets
<i>Journal of Orthopaedic and Sports Physical Therapy</i>	9 (All data-based research)	6	1	3	0	1	4	0	0	0
<i>Physical Therapy</i>	7 (4 Data-based research, 3 surveys or literature reviews)	2	1	5	1	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Journal of Athletic Training</i>	64 (All data-based research)	62	8	15	7	1	24	4	3	2

\*TM indicates therapeutic modality; ATC, certified athletic trainer.

such, are adding to this unique body of knowledge. The *Journal of Athletic Training* is a leading contributor to the art and science of therapeutic modalities by providing its readers with current research on the topic.

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