

## **Understanding Virginia's Athletic Training Law**

### **By Judy Castleman, Lobbyist for the Virginia Athletic Trainers Association**

*The Virginia Athletic Trainers Association provides this information about Virginia Code § 54.1-2900 and the regulations as a service to VHSL members. This is provided as information only and should be viewed that way. Any final interpretations of this law should be left to each school system's attorney.*

On July 1, 2002, the Virginia Code § 54.1-2900 regulating athletic training went into effect. The practice of school personnel providing medical care to athletes will need to be reviewed and possibly revised to ensure compliance with the new regulations.

In this, the legislation's inaugural school year, athletic administrators should take time to familiarize themselves with the law and its components. Becoming knowledgeable about the statute will help ensure the provision of a comprehensive athletic health care program that addresses the needs of each student athlete, while remaining legally sound.

### **What is athletic training?**

Athletic training is recognized as an allied healthcare profession by the American Medical Association. Individuals working in this profession are called certified athletic trainers or ATCs. The term ATC signifies the individual is certified through the National Athletic Trainers Association's Board of Certification (NATABOC). In Virginia, ATC's must also be state certified through the Board of Medicine. Athletic trainers specialize in the prevention, evaluation, treatment and rehabilitation of injuries to athletes and those engaged in physical activity.

In high schools, ATCs serve as integral members of the health care team, offering injury prevention protocols, injury evaluation, emergency first aid, rehabilitation and reconditioning programs that allow for a safe return to participation.

In addition to one-on-one comprehensive athletic health care, ATCs are also qualified to:

- Create an *Emergency Action Plan*
- Develop a *Return-to-Play* policy
- Offer coaches/staff in-service training in sports first aid/CPR
- Develop inclement weather protocol/guidelines
- Oversee annual pre-participation exams
- Supervise the acquisition and maintenance of appropriate athletic equipment
- Establish conditioning programs
- Create weight loss and weight management programs

### **Why is athletic training regulated by the state?**

Athletic training, like other healthcare professions, is regulated by the state to protect the public. Standards are set forth by state law to ensure the provider is a qualified professional who has the education and experience necessary to perform his/her duties.

Those who practice athletic training earn their certification through a bachelor's or graduate-level educational program and by passing an exam administered by the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) Board of Certification (NATABOC). In Virginia, ATCs must also be certified by the Virginia Board of Medicine and maintain that certification through the completion of continuing education units.

**What are athletic trainers responsibilities?**

The certified athletic trainer's responsibilities are to evaluate the individual being treated, plan the treatment program, and administer and document treatment within the limit of his or her professional knowledge, judgment and skills and in accordance with the practice of athletic training as set forth in §54.1-2900 of the Code of Virginia.

**Who can legally provide athletic training coverage to high school athletes during practices and at games?**

According to the statute, only a certified athletic trainer (ATC), holding a certificate of athletic training with the Virginia Board of Medicine, working under the direction of a licensed physician, may practice athletic training.

**What duties can coaches, teachers and other non-certified adults perform?**

Individuals are permitted to provide basic first aid within the scope of their education and duties, which consists of providing temporary support until professional medical assistance is available and followed by proper referral to a medical doctor if necessary. Non-certified adults, including coaches and volunteers may conduct or assist with exercise or conditioning programs or classes within the scope of their duties as employees or volunteers.

**If an MD or ATC determines a specific treatment is appropriate, can a coach or non-certified person give the treatment?**

Individuals who possess the skills necessary to perform non-discretionary tasks may perform those tasks under the direction and supervision of an MD or ATC.

**Can schools still have student athletic trainers?**

The NATA recommends that high school students assisting an ATC be referred to as "Athletic Training Student Aides" (ATSA). The terms "student athletic trainer" and "athletic training student" refer to individuals currently enrolled in professional athletic training education curriculums approved by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) or Joint Review Committee on Education Programs-Athletic Training (JRC-AT).

**Can high school students or ATSA's administer first aid?**

The law does not limit student's ability to provide first aid. Student responsibilities should be defined by school policies after consultation with legal counsel.

**What should athletic administrators do to ensure compliance with the new law?**

It's important for administrators to realize that they will probably be impacted by the legislation. If the school employs an "athletic trainer", or someone who holds themselves out as an athletic trainer, or practices athletic training, that person must be certified by Virginia's Board of Medicine and maintain those standards. After becoming familiar with the law and regulations, they should review all policies that affect athletic health care (i.e. return to play policies, etc.) to ensure they are legally and scientifically sound.

It's vital that administrators realize the difference between a certified athletic trainer and a "trainer" who may have previously provided healthcare. The law stipulates that anyone working in the capacity of an athletic trainer *must* be certified by Virginia's Board of Medicine. Otherwise, like coaches, their contribution to the athletic health care team is limited to providing first aid and conducting or assisting with exercise or conditioning programs or classes within the scope of their duties as employees or volunteers.

**How do schools get an ATC on staff?**

Fortunately, many schools employ at least one certified athletic trainer. For those that don't, the National Athletic Trainers' Association's (NATA) Secondary School Athletic Trainers' Committee has developed a comprehensive document to assist in the creation of a proposal to hire an ATC. The Position Proposal Guide offers tips for addressing the administration and/or school board. Every school system is unique and the Position Proposal Guide can help tailor a presentation to address a school's individual concerns.

Once the decision has been made to hire an ATC, the National Athletic Trainers' Association can help the school find candidates for the job through its online Placement Listing Service. Here, employers can link directly to a targeted and qualified job pool of certified athletic trainers. Contact the NATA at 800 879-6282 or visit [www.nata.org](http://www.nata.org).

If you have any questions, please contact Judy Castleman at [mslobyist2@aol.com](mailto:mslobyist2@aol.com).