

## THE ATHLETIC TRAINER'S ROLE IN MENTAL HEALTH

The current mental health crisis in athletics is being driven by a number of factors, including challenges in emerging adulthood, impacts of technology, increased expectations of being "always on," and the COVID-19 pandemic to name a few. To help continue to decrease the stigma surrounding mental health, athletic trainers (ATs) need to continue to promote a biopsychosocial approach to healthcare inclusive of decreasing risk factors, such as those listed above, and enhance protective factors such as supporting all athletes and implementing educational programming. *Reardon, 2023*



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### "Attitudes and Barriers Towards Seeking Behavioral Health Services in Tandem From Collegiate Athletic Trainers and Student-Athletes."

Data suggests there is a disconnect in student-athletes' attitudes towards and barriers to seeking mental health services and those perceived by ATs working within collegiate athletics. Athletic trainers must be aware of their own implicit bias regarding athlete's help seeking behaviors and work to understand how that bias impacts patient care. *Kirby et al, 2022 (S-246)*

### "Perceptions of Behavioral Health Specialists at NCAA Power 5 Universities on Athletic Trainers' Roles in Managing Behavioral Health Conditions."

Student-athletes receive the most effective behavioral healthcare when there is an informed, collaborative care model. *Mills et al, 2022 (S-250)*

### "Primary Mental Health Resources Utilized by Student-Athletes as Compared to Their Non-Athlete Peers."

Student-athletes in our sample use different individuals as primary mental health resources than their non-athlete peers, specifically for concerns related to anxiety, substance use, and bipolar disorder. Individuals in these roles should be trained at identifying risk factors and warning signs of mental health concerns, and how to facilitate proper referral to an appropriate mental health provider. *Gray et al, 2021 (S-215)*

## RESOURCES

#### Infographic:

NATA: [Understanding Athlete Burnout & Mental Health](#)

#### AMSSM Position Statement:

[Mental health issues and psychological factors in athletes](#)

#### Other:

IOC: [Mental Health in Elite Athletes Toolkit](#)

#### Podcasts

Athletic Training Chat: [ATs Role in Mental Health Wellness for Our Patients](#)

Athletic Training Chat: [Navigating Mental Health as a Clinical Athletic Trainer](#)

Candid Athletic Trainer: [Mental Health Screening](#)



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ATs who more recently completed their professional program felt better equipped to recognize and refer athletes with mental health conditions than those with more years of clinical experience. Additionally, ATs are less confident in working with psychosis or substance use disorders. Practicing clinicians should seek additional training and continuing education related to mental health disorders especially those who graduated prior to the 2020 updated CAATE standards. *Ostrowski et al, 2023*

Social determinants of health influence mental health and physical health equally. ATs should observe these barriers and consider their effect on health disparities. Understanding these determinants can help ATs better manage the physical and mental health of their athletes. *Beaupre et al, 2022*

Job demands can hinder the tactical athlete's mental health, but most ATs feel their education lacked comprehensive mental health training to manage these situations appropriately. Furthermore, unfamiliar experiences and lack of policies and procedures to manage mental health conditions prevent ATs from being able to respond well. Improving role delineation, development of comprehensive policies and acquiring additional mental health education and training could help ATs in this setting. *Loveless et al, 2022*

Collegiate student-athletes have increased expectations for a variety of reasons (e.g., academics, performance). While there are resources available that are helpful, there are perceived barriers to these resources (e.g., timeliness of appointments, incomprehension of counselors). ATs can empower athletes to use self-regulated coping strategies and help create athlete-centered mental health resources. *Young et al, 2022*

