RESEARCH in sport psychology supports the inclusion of psychological interventions during athletic injury rehabilitation. Although the sport psychology world is familiar with the strategies that could help during rehabilitation, it seems that front-line warriors (i.e., athletic trainers, sports medicine physicians) are not as aware of how to use or teach psychological skills (e.g., goal setting, imagery) to injured athletes. Athletic trainers are in a perfect position to train athletes to use psychological skills that can facilitate injury rehabilitation.

A course in sport psychology is not a requirement for certification as an athletic trainer, but counseling and knowledge of psychological aspects of injury are required competencies for certification. Many education programs for athletic trainers and therapists fall short of adequate training in this area. For example, 84% of surveyed Australian sport physiotherapists reported that their training did not adequately prepare them to deal with psychological aspects of injury and 87% wanted additional training. Most of the athletic trainers surveyed by Larson et al. also reported that a course in sport psychology was important (85%), yet only about half (54%) had taken a formal course in sport psychology. Researchers suggest that athletic trainers would benefit from structured educational training in psychological aspects of athletic injury.

Teaching athletic trainers to deliver sport psychology rehabilitation interventions can lead to proficiency in their utilization and the view that they are effective. We have found, however, that athletic trainers are not always receptive to the use of such interventions. In an effort to understand the problem and to bring sport psychology into the athletic training room, we sought to develop a better program.

Teaching Psychological Skills to Athletic Trainers and Students

Trying to teach psychological skills to a busy group of athletic training students and graduate athletic trainers and at three different sites is not an easy task. After consulting personal schedules, athletic training room coverage schedules, team practice schedules, and class commitments, training sessions were scheduled for teaching psychological skills. For some of the skill training sessions, the only person in attendance was the skills trainer! As a result, the planned project was a general failure. Fortunately, the athletic trainers who completed the psychological skills
training reported using the skills often when working with injured athletes after the training. They reported a perception of possessing greater skill in using psychological techniques as a result of the training. Although the project had some success, only eight of 87 recruited people participated in the psychological skills training program. So what happened?

To figure out what went wrong, we sent a one-page questionnaire to everyone who did not participate. Responses were received by 25 individuals (32% response rate), 7 who were certified athletic trainers and 18 who were athletic training students. The questionnaire asked participants to identify all of the benefits they would have realized from participation in the psychological skills training program (i.e., learning sport psychology rehabilitation interventions, having the opportunity to practice the learned skills, earning CEUs, being entered into a random cash drawing). They rank ordered (e.g., 1, 2, 3) their reason(s) for not participating: too time consuming, too busy with work in the athletic training room, too busy with schoolwork, did not anticipate benefiting from participation, costs outweighed benefit of participation, and participation requirements unclear. Two open-ended questions were also asked: why the individual did not participate and what would increase the likelihood of participation in such a program. Other information collected includes the respondent’s age, gender, years of athletic training experience, and knowledge about sport psychology (a copy of the questionnaire can be obtained from the lead author).

Almost all of the certified athletic trainers and athletic training students who completed the questionnaire were aware that they would have learned about sport psychology rehabilitation interventions by participating (91%), and more than half knew that they would have had the opportunity to practice the skills (59%). More than half of the certified athletic trainers did not realize that they would be able to earn continuing education units (57%). Approximately one-third of those who did not participate were aware that they would be entered into a $50 cash drawing (32%).

The reasons for not participating in the program are presented in Table 1, with the percentage of respondents who cited a given reason as first, second, third. Responses to the open-ended question, “In your own words, why did you choose not to participate?” tended to fall into discrete categories: the study was too time consuming/athletic trainer was too busy (68%), had no interest in the study (20%), and other responses, such as “not working with a team yet” and “in the process of deciding my future plans” (16%). Responses to the question, “What would make you more likely to participate in a study like this?” were grouped as follows: if the training study was less time consuming/the athletic trainer had more time (57%), if the training was conducted during off-season (13%), if there was less paperwork involved (13%), and a variety of other reasons (39%), such as “if I knew more about the benefits of participation,” and “not having a family emergency.”

Despite our efforts to make the psychological skills training accessible (i.e., scheduled according to prospective participants’ availability) and as minimally time consuming as possible (i.e., six hours over a three week period), timing seemed to be the biggest issue. Because we wanted to evaluate the effect of psychological skills training on the treatment of injured athletes, we chose to conduct the study during the period when athletic trainers’ teams were in-season. Offering the program at a time when an athletic trainer’s primary team was not in-season may have increased participation but would not have provided the opportunity to immediately practice what had been learned.

The incentives offered (i.e., 6 CEUs, cash award, refreshments at all psychological skills training sessions) were selected on the basis of input from the prospective participants, so we expected a higher participation rate. Although athletic trainers must earn 80 CEUs over a three-year period, they may not be interested in learning about sport psychology as a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>1st</th>
<th>2nd</th>
<th>3rd</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study too time consuming</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too busy with work in athletic training room</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too busy with schoolwork</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would not gain from study</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost outweighed benefit</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclear what would have to do</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
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means of earning CEUs. Cuppett reported that athletic trainers did not mention the need for training in psychological skills when surveyed about continuing education needs.

There are many ways to provide psychological skills training and to conduct research on its effectiveness. The following considerations might improve participation. Given the time constraints of athletic trainers, they might be more likely to participate in a single-session program. Athletic trainers may view this format as more appealing for earning six CEUs, rather than having multiple sessions spread over several weeks. There is evidence that such training is effective. The one-day training method used by Pero and Sachs was reported to result in routine use of the psychological techniques learned by athletic trainers in the workshop and retention of the information one year later.

Another approach would be to formally integrate psychological skills training into an athletic training education program curriculum. This could be done by either adding a sport psychology unit to an existing course (e.g., practicum course) or by creating a separate psychology of injury course. Integrating the psychological skill training sessions into class time would greatly minimize the time commitment burden for students, thus removing a major obstacle to participation in such training. The inclusion of such material in the curriculum would convey the importance of psychological skill training and the need for more research on its effectiveness. For practicing athletic trainers, incorporating psychological skill training sessions into regular staff meetings may be an option. The follow-up questionnaire responses suggested that there was an interest in participating, but simply not enough time to do so.

**Summary**

The National Athletic Training Association recognizes the need for athletic trainers to possess knowledge and skills in the area of sport psychology, and the Association for Applied Sport Psychology is interested in working collaboratively to educate athletic trainers. Researchers have reported that athletic trainers recognize the value of psychological skills training, but we found that many did not take advantage of the opportunity to obtain it. To realize a high rate of participation in a psychological skills training program for athletic trainers and athletic training students, the format for program delivery must not conflict with established time consuming commitments.

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