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Original Research

Formal and Informal Continuing Education Activities and Athletic Training Professional Practice

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Abstract

Context: Continuing education (CE) is intended to promote professional growth and, ultimately, to enhance professional practice.

Objective: To determine certified athletic trainers' participation in formal (ie, approved for CE credit) and informal (ie, not approved for CE credit) CE activities and the perceived effect these activities have on professional practice with regard to improving knowledge, clinical skills and abilities, attitudes toward patient care, and patient care itself.

Design: Cross-sectional study.

Setting: Athletic training practice settings.

Patients or Other Participants: Of a geographic, stratified random sample of 1000 athletic trainers, 427 (42.7%) completed the survey.

Main Outcome Measure(s): The Survey of Formal and Informal Athletic Training Continuing Education Activities was developed and administered electronically. The survey consisted of demographic characteristics and Likert-scale items regarding CE participation and perceived effect of CE on professional practice. Internal consistency of survey items was determined using the Cronbach α ($\alpha = 0.945$). Descriptive statistics were computed for all items. An analysis of variance and dependent *t* tests were calculated to determine differences among respondents' demographic characteristics and their participation in, and perceived effect of, CE activities. The α level was set at .05.

Results: Respondents completed more informal CE activities than formal CE activities. Participation in informal CE activities included reading athletic training journals (75.4%), whereas formal CE activities included attending a Board of Certification-approved workshop, seminar, or professional conference not conducted by the National Athletic Trainers' Association or affiliates or committees (75.6%). Informal CE activities were perceived to improve clinical skills or abilities

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and attitudes toward patient care. Formal CE activities were perceived to enhance knowledge.

Conclusions: More respondents completed informal CE activities than formal CE activities. Both formal and informal CE activities were perceived to enhance athletic training professional practice. Informal CE activities should be explored and considered for CE credit.

Keywords: [athletic trainers](#), [professional advancement](#), [lifelong learning](#)

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