

# Maintaining Professional Commitment as a Newly Credentialed Athletic Trainer in the Secondary School Setting

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**Context:** Professional commitment, or one's affinity and loyalty to a career, has become a topic of interest in athletic training. The expanding research on the topic, however, has omitted newly credentialed athletic trainers (ATs). For an impressionable group of practitioners, transitioning to clinical practice can be stressful.

**Objective:** To explore the professional commitment of newly credentialed ATs in the secondary school setting.

**Setting:** Secondary school.

**Design:** Qualitative study.

**Patients or Other Participants:** A total of 31 newly credentialed ATs (6 men, 25 women; mean age =  $24 \pm 3$  years) participated. Of these, 17 ATs (4 men, 13 women; mean age =  $25 \pm 4$  years) were employed full time in the secondary school setting, and 14 ATs (2 men, 12 women; mean age =  $23.0 \pm 2.0$  years) were graduate assistant students in the secondary school setting.

**Data Collection and Analysis:** All participants completed semistructured interviews, which focused on their experiences in the secondary school setting and transitioning into the role and

setting. Transcripts were analyzed using the phenomenologic approach. Creditability was established by peer review, member checks, and researcher triangulation.

**Results:** Four main findings related to the professional commitment of newly credentialed ATs in the secondary school setting were identified. Work-life balance, professional relationships formed with the student-athletes, enjoyment gained from working in the secondary school setting, and professional responsibility emerged as factors facilitating commitment.

**Conclusions:** Affective commitment is a primary facilitator of professional commitment. Newly credentialed ATs who enjoy their jobs and have time to engage in nonwork roles are able to maintain a positive professional commitment. Our findings align with the previous literature and help strengthen our understanding that rejuvenation and passion are important to professional commitment.

**Key Words:** work-life balance, work roles, transition to clinical practice

## Key Points

- Work-life balance is an important facilitator of professional commitment for the athletic trainer in the secondary school setting.
- Positive workplace relationships can help the secondary school athletic trainer to maintain professional commitment.

The first-time transition to clinical practice for athletic trainers (ATs) has been described as stressful and overwhelming.<sup>1</sup> During this period, stress increases as newly credentialed ATs must overcome self-doubt and acclimate to their new places of employment.<sup>1</sup> Athletic trainers are not alone in this transition process, which is marked by stress, anxiety, and fear.<sup>2,3</sup> The transition to clinical practice is a process that is often bracketed by shifting from one state (ie, student with little decision-making or other responsibilities) to another (ie, independent practitioner), and the change is often accompanied by increases in expectations, roles, and responsibilities and thus, increases in stress and anxiety.<sup>4–6</sup>

In the literature, transition to practice has been labeled *transition shock* due to the link to stress and anxiety for newly credentialed health care providers.<sup>3</sup> A primary

catalyst to better understanding role adaptation and the work transition for newly credentialed health care providers is the relationship between effective coping and the quality of care provided to patients.<sup>7</sup> So, newly credentialed health care providers who are resilient, passionate, and acclimated to their roles are more likely to provide better care and remain steadfast in their job.<sup>3</sup>

The topic of transition to practice has gained popularity in athletic training as educational reform is upon the profession, and questions have been raised about the readiness of newly credentialed ATs.<sup>8</sup> Researchers<sup>9,10</sup> have addressed attempts to encourage and facilitate role adaptation and role transition; these facilitators are focused in 2 primary areas (mentorship and orientations) and 1 cursory area (past experiences). Support for transitioning practitioners often stems from mentoring and orientation

sessions, and past experiences in the setting one is transitioning to also benefit the process.<sup>1,11</sup>

Despite the growing literature on the topic, we have yet to explore the professional commitment of newly credentialed ATs. In the nursing literature, a failed transition to clinical practice is strongly connected to turnover and staff shortages.<sup>12–14</sup> Professional commitment is an individualized construct conceptualized by one's emotional attachment to one's position.<sup>15</sup> An individual's investment in and commitment to his or her job and profession can be influenced by many variables, including the nature of the job, appreciation, compensation, and opportunity for advancement.<sup>15–17</sup> For ATs, who have been described as internally motivated, responsibility to their patients, love for the profession and role of the AT, and ongoing learning positively influence commitment.<sup>16–18</sup> Role overload, particularly long work hours and an insufficient number of staff members to adequately address the health care needs of the institution, negatively affects one's perception of commitment.<sup>10</sup>

We have a strong understanding of professional commitment within the collegiate setting but minimal knowledge of same in the secondary school setting.<sup>16,17</sup> However, commitment in the secondary school setting is important to understand, as this setting has emerged as the most popular choice for employment, and many newly credentialed ATs seek employment there. Moreover, many states have changed medical coverage policies in the secondary school setting and require an AT's employment or, at minimum, presence during athletic competitions.<sup>19,20</sup> We were particularly interested in the practices newly credentialed ATs used to maintain a sense of passion and enthusiasm for the job as they navigated their first positions. In a larger study, we gathered data on the experiences of newly credentialed ATs in the secondary school setting, and in that study, we were able to understand role transition and how they developed a passion for the setting. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to share the newly credentialed ATs' sense of professional commitment in the secondary school setting.

## METHODS

### Research Design

We used a phenomenologic approach to our investigation, as we wanted to obtain our participants' perspectives on maintaining professional commitment during their first year of clinical practice in the secondary school setting. Because our primary objective was to describe the experiences of our participants regarding professional commitment, phenomenology was the most appropriate method.<sup>21</sup> Professional commitment was previously studied qualitatively in athletic training, and we borrowed our framework and interview protocols from these studies<sup>11,16,17</sup> to help us maintain comparable and, we hoped, relatable findings.

### Participants

A total of 31 (6 men, 25 women; mean age =  $24 \pm 3$  years) newly credentialed ATs completed our study. Of these, 17 ATs (4 men, 13 women; mean age =  $25 \pm 4$  years) were employed full time in the secondary school

setting, and 14 ATs (2 men, 12 women; mean age =  $23.0 \pm 2.0$  years) were graduate assistant ATs in the secondary school setting. On average, the full-time ATs worked  $40 \pm 10$  hours per week, and the graduate assistant ATs worked  $28 \pm 6$  hours per week. The Table provides the demographic data for this sample.

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit and interview ATs who had been credentialed for less than 1 year and were working in the secondary school setting.<sup>22</sup> We intentionally included graduate students and full-time ATs in this setting, as we believed employment in this setting was supported by both of these contract types. Thus, to fully capture the experiences related to professional commitment of newly credentialed ATs in this setting, we felt this approach was warranted.

### Data-Collection Procedures

Upon receiving institutional review board approval, we recruited participants using a criterion sampling procedure.<sup>22</sup> Via our professional networks, we contacted program directors of Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education accredited professional bachelor's and master's programs to gain access to possible participants. We asked them to share our recruitment message with those graduates who had been credentialed for less than 1 year and who were working 20 or more hours per week in the secondary school setting. Data recruitment was based on saturation but also relatively equal participation in each contract type (ie, graduate assistant versus full-time employment).<sup>21</sup>

All participants completed semistructured interviews, which focused on their experiences in the secondary school setting and transitioning into both the role and setting. Questions were derived from the literature<sup>11,16,17</sup> for consistency and a focus that reflected the landscape of qualitative inquiries into professional commitment. We used the semistructured approach to allow for a more dialogue-based interview with more discourse between the researchers and participants as well as to encourage participants to share their thoughts, opinions, and reflections.<sup>22</sup> We called on an external researcher to review our interview protocol. The external researcher functioned as an auditor and was selected because of her role in professional education and knowledge of the socialization framework, the foundation of our study. *Socialization* is an adjustment process, whereby a person is learning and adapting to a new role or environment or both. This developmental process can be supported before and after entering the workforce.<sup>21</sup> We used her feedback to establish rigor in the protocol and to make sure we asked questions that reflected our purpose, research agenda, and use of the socialization framework related to professional commitment. Then we piloted our protocol with 2 ATs who fit our criteria. The feedback gained in both steps allowed us to ensure the flow of the interviews and to interpret the questions asked of our participants. The final interview guide included questions such as “describe to me how you have maintained your level of professional commitment during this year,” “how have you remained motivated?,” and “how has your current work setting influenced your level of professional commitment over the last year?”

**Table. Individual Athletic Trainers' (ATs') Demographic Data**

Participants Pseudonym	Age, y	Sex	Type of Employment	Time Worked in the School, h/wk	No. of ATs Practicing in the School
Alice	23	Female	Full-time high school AT	40	1
Amanda	23	Female	Physical education teacher and AT	40–60	2
Barry	26	Male	Full-time high school AT	44	1 (plus a per diem substitute)
Caitlin	23	Female	Clinic and high school	20–30	1
Carol	22	Female	Graduate assistant	20	1
Dana	23	Female	Graduate assistant	30	1
Doris	23	Female	Graduate assistant	30–35	1
Elaine	25	Female	Hospital and high school	35	1
Estelle	22	Female	Graduate assistant	25–30	1
Felicity	23	Female	Full-time high school AT	35–50	1
Helen	22	Female	Graduate assistant	25–30	2
Iris	22	Female	Full-time high school AT	35+	1
Jerry	22	Male	Graduate assistant	20–40	3
Jesse	36	Female	Clinic and high school	20–35	2
Joanne	30	Female	Graduate assistant	30–35	1
Joe	27	Male	Full-time high school AT	50+	2
John	23	Male	Sports medicine high school teacher and AT	21 (AT only)	1
Kramer	23	Male	Graduate assistant	25	1
Laurel	24	Female	Full-time high school AT	40	1
Marla	23	Female	Graduate assistant	15–20	2
Nyssa	23	Female	Clinic and high school	40	1
Oliver	23	Male	Full-time high school AT	25	1
Patty	22	Female	Full-time high school AT	50+	2
Rachel	24	Female	Clinic and high school	30–32	1
Renee	24	Female	Graduate assistant	30	2
Ruthie	24	Female	Graduate assistant	15–20	2
Sara	22	Female	Clinic and high school	40	2 (on rotation)
Sue	23	Female	Graduate assistant	20	2
Susan	22	Female	Graduate assistant	20–30	2
Thea	35	Female	Full-time high school AT	45–50	3
Tina	23	Female	Graduate assistant	30	2

## Analysis and Credibility Strategies

Our first step involved becoming familiar with our data; this was accomplished by completing multiple readings of our data and then creating memos in the transcripts to articulate the main findings.<sup>22</sup> Phenomenologic research design is structured so as to gain meaning from the experiences of individuals, and therefore, for us to fully appreciate our participants' experiences, we needed to become acquainted with the data. Next, we explored the data for commonalities by organizing our memos to reflect meaning. Memos were categorized by themes and grouped to reflect common experiences and responses to the interview guide. As part of the memo process, we brought awareness to our potential biases and presuppositions about the topic. Bracketing is a multifaceted technique used in phenomenologic research to reduce the potential bias that can accompany analyses.<sup>23</sup> Despite knowledge of the research agenda, those involved in the immediate collection and analysis of the data were not actively living the experience under study.<sup>23</sup> Once the most dominant responses were determined and operationalized into themes, raw data were used to support those themes. We used descriptors to best define the final themes and to connect them to our research agenda.

We established credibility by using a peer-reviewed process, member checks, and researcher triangulation. The peer-reviewed process provided accountability to the research process and the presentation of the findings. The peer, who possesses expertise as a qualitative researcher,

also has a working knowledge of the secondary school setting, a perspective that complemented the experiences of the participants interviewed in this study. Our peer verified that our coding process was accurate and reflected the participants' experiences. All of our participants were given the chance to review and verify their transcripts, ensuring accuracy of the transcription and their experiences as ATs in the secondary school setting. Data analysis was completed independently by 2 researchers who then compared their findings to reduce bias and improve the transferability and presentation of the findings.

## RESULTS

Our analyses revealed 4 main findings related to the professional commitment of newly credentialed ATs in the secondary school setting. Work-life balance, professional relationships formed with the student-athletes, enjoyment gained from working in the secondary school setting, and professional responsibility emerged as factors facilitating commitment. We discuss each finding with quotes from the participants. The findings reflect all participants, who were employed as either full-time or as graduate assistant ATs.

### Rejuvenation and Balance

Professional commitment was observed in our participants because they had the chance to achieve work-life balance and had time for nonwork obligations. Our participants were able to remain committed because they

believed they had time to rejuvenate and be away from the role of the AT. Kramer said, “I am in [a] place [a work setting] that I can have time for myself, too.” When asked about professional commitment, her current position, and athletic training overall, Alice stated, “Being in a place where I can balance it all.” During the interviews, participants described the setting as one that offered “flexibility” and “opportunities to get away” when discussing their ability to maintain professional commitment.

Laurel talked about how the setting “allows me to create a routine and schedule.” In her mind, the structure supported her ability to “get away but still have time to invest in her job.” Iris discussed the work schedule as conducive to a balanced lifestyle that helped her stay committed:

Well, it’s nice because with the high school level, we work Monday–Friday. Sometimes you’ll have your occasional Saturday or Sunday stuff, especially with the hospital. We are contracted out to other events, so we’ll have what’s called *secondary coverage*. Normally those are on Saturdays or Sundays, but they’re only a few times in [a] month. So, it’s nice because you have your weekends off, and you can relax, go out, go to dinner, stuff like that.

John shared:

Because I work in the high school, I get weekends off for the most part. On the weekends, I can hang out with friends and go visit people if I want to. With the school calendar, I have the month off in July. I get the whole month off. And then there is winter break and teacher workdays. Always time between the months.

We asked our participants to share their daily schedules, and many described situations that were structured and consistent, using phrases such as “balanced” and “not feeling that work was overwhelming.” Finding balance was attributed to having weekends off and time to get away, and that balance fostered commitment for our participants. We acknowledge that at least half of our participants worked alongside another staff member, which is unique in this setting; typically only 1 full-time staff member is present in this setting, but the additional staff member possibly contributed to the ability to create balance and rejuvenate.

**Relationships Developed Within the Secondary School Setting.** Our participants discussed the ability to remain focused, motivated, and committed because of the people they worked with in the secondary school setting. During the interviews, many ATs talked about their relationships with student-athletes and how their presence affected the students’ well-being and success in playing sports. Regarding her ability to maintain enthusiasm, Amanda commented, “I think it [passion for my job] was easy to kind of keep, because every day you had a least 1 football player in the athletic training room trying to get back to practice. You could really see, yeah I’m really helping.” Carol “loved being an athletic trainer” and being able to interact with her student-athletes every day “is what’s helped me maintain it [my commitment].”

When describing the best parts of their jobs or what keeps them going each day, many said “the student-athletes” or “the kids I work with every day.” When asked about maintaining her commitment, Iris remarked, “I like working with the kids. They make me laugh on the day to day. I like just hearing their little qualms and everything they go through on the day to day.” Ruthie agreed:

Because I enjoy being here [I am able to stay motivated]. Even if I was having a bad day, whatever it was that was related to it, the second those kids walked through my door when the bell rings, they basically put a smile on my face. They remind me of why I’m here and what I’m doing.

Dana’s thoughts about her professional commitment reflected a sense of enthusiasm for the secondary school setting, her student-athletes, and the chance to be a part of their lives—not just the sports aspect:

I have 420 something athletes, and I enjoy something each day. It’s a people profession, and when you care for them, these kids . . . But, these kids, when you show them that you care about them and you want the best for them, you’re going to feel protected by all these kids, because they know that I’ll protect them. They can, whether I’m having a bad day, they’ll be able to turn my day around. The sports community and sports family is incredibly motivational.

We asked our participants a variety of questions related to their role in the setting and their likes and dislikes, successes, and commitment. The common finding among these answers was the participants’ relationships with their student-athletes.

## Workplace Satisfaction

Our participants also described an affinity for the secondary school setting; simply put, they enjoyed working in the setting, which facilitated their commitment. As much as they enjoyed the relationships forged with the student-athletes, they also liked the atmosphere in the secondary school setting. Participant statements included “It’s great to be a part of the school community,” “I appreciate all it has to offer; The dynamic is great,” and “Working with the younger population is uplifting.” Ruthie said, “[The secondary school setting] is a great setting.” During the interviews, others noted, “I really enjoy this setting,” or “I like the variety it can offer; it keeps things fresh and me motivated.” Tina indicated that the secondary setting offered variety, a catalyst to keeping the AT motivated:

I also think that at a high school, it’s really refreshing when you change from fall sports to winter sports and then winter sports to spring sports. You get a good variety, so it keeps things interesting. You have different athletes, different coaches, but I definitely think that helps.

Joe took his current position because of his “love for the secondary school setting.” When asked why, he shared, “Because I enjoy all the things I can do and get to do. Every



day can be different.” Marla viewed the secondary school setting as “the best part of my day. I really like what I do, and I really like working as an athletic trainer in the high school setting.” Sue felt commitment was easy, as “I really enjoy everything about athletic training, so I’m naturally a positive person as it is. So, I feel like it’s pretty easy.” When asked to explain more about her commitment in the secondary school setting, she said, “A lot of the success that I get to experience at my setting [has] helped as well in keeping me enthusiastic about being at the high school. I think I just really enjoy the atmosphere [of the secondary school setting].”

#### **Rewards Associated With Professional Responsibility.**

Our participants maintained professional commitment through the opportunity to assist their student-athletes during the recovery process. Several offered stories of student-athletes returning to play after an injury, and being a part of that process was motivating. Helen, like many of our participants, told stories of returning injured athletes to the playing field as a motivator, a reason she loved her job, and a contributor to her satisfaction in working in the secondary school setting:

Seeing the kid who was injured and working with them and progressing them through their rehab, and seeing them go on the field and make a goal in soccer or make an awesome play in football or just hit a baseball after seeing them go through rehab, it’s a satisfying feeling. I helped this kid return to what they’re passionate about and what they love. It’s fulfilling.

Similarly, Estelle felt stimulated by her role in treating her student-athletes: “I think all the things that motivate us as athletic trainers [is return to play]. I just had a kid come off a horrendous ankle sprain, grade III tear, and he did his whole rehabilitation protocol with me. He just got cleared last week after 12 weeks in rehab.”

Dana had a comparable story about maintaining her commitment that involved simply helping one of her student-athletes recover from an injury:

A great example [of how I stay committed] is during baseball season this year I had a kid with a grade III ankle sprain. It took us quite a while to rehab him and get him confident and back out there. Every time he would run the bases, make it to first base, I’d always see him look over and give me a thumb’s up. He just credited me with so much with rehab.

Carol’s professional commitment to her student-athletes’ well-being was maintained in a more global perspective:

I think what’s helped me maintain it is the kids, for one, and then just knowing that at the end of the day my actions might have helped someone’s life. My actions might have helped someone, you know, go through their day with less pain or something along those lines.

Elaine discussed the importance of student-athlete safety and working hard to maintain it:

There are a lot of things that I want to do and put in place [regarding policies for safety] and be a little more

involved with my athletes [with treatments and return to play]. I think for me, it [my commitment] was just setting that goal like this is where I want the athletic training program here to be. That’s what really, that’s what pretty much kept me committed to still doing what I do and working so hard and coming in in the mornings.

Professional commitment was facilitated by the ATs’ professional responsibility to their student-athletes and in helping them safely return to play or developing policies and procedures that could support their wellbeing.

## **DISCUSSION**

We set out to better understand the professional commitment of newly credentialed ATs in the secondary school setting. Our findings showed that professional commitment was facilitated by the creation of work-life balance, a commitment to the student-athletes and the relationships developed with them, and enjoyment gained from working in the secondary school setting. Professional responsibility appeared to be the foundation for professional commitment of the AT in this setting and possibly for the AT regardless of the employment setting.<sup>16–18</sup> The opportunity for rejuvenation and balance have also been found to be important in supporting professional commitment.<sup>24</sup>

### **Rejuvenation and Balance**

Time for rejuvenation is important to stimulate and support professional commitment.<sup>17</sup> This concept, whereby separation from the professional role facilitates commitment to that role, speaks to why this group identified work-life balance and time for nonwork interests as catalysts to professional commitment. Organizational researchers<sup>25–29</sup> have unequivocally linked the facilitation of work-life balance to professional and organizational commitment. This relationship describes the perceptions of feeling supported, having the chance to get away, and not being overloaded or overwhelmed by work roles.<sup>25</sup> Our participants described opportunities to get away, time for outside activities and other important aspects of their lives not associated with working, addressing the idea of reducing overload to improve and increase commitment.

We studied 2 distinct groups of secondary school ATs, and although the settings were the same, the graduate assistant ATs also had to balance academic expectations, which have been proven to affect stress levels, as well as the ability to create balance. Graduate assistant ATs must communicate their needs as individuals to their supervisors, but they must also be prepared to seek mentors and others working in similar settings to gain support, guidance, and advice on how to navigate the role successfully.

**Relationships Developed Within the Secondary School Setting.** Professional responsibility and a sense of caring have been described<sup>11,12,17</sup> as facilitators to professional commitment within the health care community. In the earliest literature in athletic training,<sup>18</sup> a sense of professional responsibility and the development of meaningful professional relationships with student-athletes were established as promoters of professional commitment. This finding appears to transcend clinical

settings, as researchers have continued to link these concepts to student-athletes and caring for them as a motivator. Developing clinical expertise and the effective characteristics of an AT is rooted in caring, service orientation, and building relationships, so the connection with these same attributes to professional commitment is reasonable.<sup>16,17,30</sup>

Our findings strengthen those of Pitney,<sup>17</sup> who also described the importance of the relationships built within the secondary school setting as facilitators of professional commitment. Eason et al<sup>11</sup> and Winterstein<sup>18</sup> found the connection between relationship building and interactions with student-athletes to be a positive, direct influence on ATs' professional commitment. Affective commitment develops when a professional gains satisfaction from his or her job, which facilitates the commitment. So for newly credentialed secondary school ATs, working with student-athletes at this level is rewarding.<sup>31</sup> In fact, the relationships described by our participants slightly mirror those of a mentoring-type relationship. That is, our participants felt as though their involvement in the setting was greater than just providing health care but was also linked to their personal development. Pitney<sup>17</sup> noted a similar result in his study of the secondary school setting, whereby professional commitment was stimulated by the professional responsibility ATs felt toward their student-athletes.

### Workplace Satisfaction

Professional commitment is a construct that is founded on the strength of attachment and loyalty to one's career and organization.<sup>30,31</sup> Thus, it is not surprising that our participants shared their enjoyment of and satisfaction with the setting and the reasons why they were able to maintain their professional commitment. Affective professional commitment has been discussed as the emotional aspect of the construct: people develop a sense of professional commitment because they want to and because they enjoy the role they play in the setting.<sup>31,32</sup> Athletic trainers have demonstrated high levels of affective commitment, meaning they love the nature of their job, and the work setting can facilitate that commitment.<sup>16</sup> The literature has linked working conditions and work roles to professional commitment. Therefore, when employees enjoy what they do, they are likely to remain committed.<sup>33</sup> Professional commitment is a multifactorial construct, but put simply, when people are satisfied with their roles and enjoy them, they are committed.

**Rewards Associated With Professional Responsibility.** Previous authors have identified ATs' commitment to their role as health care providers, and their professional responsibility facilitates their commitment. Health care is inherently humanistic; hence, it is not surprising that our participants would share their connection to caring for their student-athletes and its effect on their professional commitment.<sup>16</sup> In some of the earliest research<sup>16</sup> in athletic training, a professional connection to the health and well-being of one's student-athletes was a facilitator of professional commitment. Today, this appears to remain true: that is, ATs find commitment and motivation to remain in the field because of the role they play and the dedication they have to caring for their student-ath-

letes.<sup>14,15</sup> Much like ATs, nurses remain committed to their careers and profession because they want to provide the best patient care they can while on the job.<sup>12</sup> The professional responsibility aspect of our participants' maintenance of professional commitment speaks to the affective aspect of the construct. They develop an attachment and loyalty, which positively influences their commitment.<sup>30</sup>

### LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

We recognize the limitations of our study. Our results only address the professional commitment of those ATs with less than 1 year of clinical experience employed in the secondary school setting. Although our results complement the work of Pitney,<sup>17</sup> who examined commitment in the setting, we understand that other variables, including experience and work setting, can influence commitment. Future investigators need to examine professional commitment from a larger perspective and should include more participants with various levels of experience. We used a qualitative paradigm, which is common for this type of research; however, validated and reliable instruments are available to measure professional commitment. We selected a qualitative paradigm due to the individuality component of the professional commitment construct but recognize that quantifying an AT's commitment can be useful as well. Including the scales validated by Meyer et al<sup>31</sup> in future research could broaden our understanding of the ATs' level of commitment to the secondary school setting. The professional commitment scale allows for an assessment of affective, continuance, and normative commitment, constructs that specifically define one's loyalty and sense of obligation to their profession.<sup>31</sup> Next, we only examined the professional commitment of newly credentialed ATs in the secondary school setting. We believe other settings must also be examined to appreciate the varying roles, expectations, and responsibilities of clinical settings that can affect professional commitment. From a global perspective, professional commitment is often influenced by such variables as job burnout, satisfaction, and work-life balance; although they have been linked in athletic training, we are not sure if these variables also influence patient care and patient outcomes. Finally, our focus was the ability of newly credentialed ATs to maintain professional commitment, not barriers to it. Future authors could include this aspect of the construct to fully appreciate professional commitment in this setting.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Reflecting on our findings, we offer the following recommendations to newly credentialed ATs. We make our recommendations from the individual's perspective, but those recommendations extend to the organization as well.

#### Organizational Considerations

1. Find a work environment that allows for time away from the role of AT. This environment should include coworkers or supervisors who support and encourage time away from the workplace.

2. Develop relationships with members of the secondary school community, as these can foster a positive work environment that contributes to commitment.
3. Reflect on the secondary school setting and remember the reasons why you were attracted to the position in the first place.
4. Be involved in the setting by developing healthy professional relationships with those in the secondary school community (ie, parents, student-athletes).
5. Take the time to engage in workplace roles that provide you with satisfaction.

## Personal Considerations

1. Create daily routines and take advantage of downtime to invest in outside roles, which in turn promote commitment.
2. Make time for personal hobbies and interests, as creating a balance between personal and professional roles can stimulate motivation and enjoyment in both areas.

## CONCLUSIONS

Professional commitment, as demonstrated by our participants, can be fostered when ATs have time to engage in activities that do not involve athletic training. It can also be supported when the setting provides satisfaction and enjoyment and meaningful relationships are built. Our results speak to the ability of newly credentialed ATs to maintain commitment to the profession as they find enjoyment in the work setting, make personal connections, and gain rewards from helping their student-athletes. Athletic trainers transitioning into clinical practice for the first time are susceptible to increased stress as they navigate their independence and decision-making skills. We know newly credentialed ATs can develop burnout, a consequence that can reduce satisfaction and commitment in the work setting.<sup>33</sup> Despite the possibility of negative consequences to the demands placed on newly credentialed ATs, commitment can be cultivated and supported, and it is important for ATs to reflect on those rewarding aspects of the job.

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