

Prioritizing the Vitality of the Athletic Training Profession

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Exploring concepts and constructs related to the work-life balance of athletic trainers has been a priority of ours for years, and it has been an honor to serve as guest editors for this special issue of the *Journal of Athletic Training*. In 2019, the Strategic Alliance released its prioritized research agenda for the athletic training profession and included the exploration of solutions to improve work-life balance.¹ The prioritized research agenda came on the heels of the National Athletic Trainers' Association position statement on facilitating work-life balance for the athletic trainer,² a statement that not only advocated for improved quality of life but also recognized the need for more research in work-life balance. Work-life balance is one possible individual outcome of the *work-life interface*, or the overlap between work and personal roles.³ It has always been our belief that in order to suggest and implement solutions to address concerns related to the work-life interface, we need a better understanding of what those concerns are, which is what prompted us to advocate for and create this special issue.

The athletic training literature related to the work-life interface is robust and has roots dating back to the late 1980s, before athletic training was recognized as an allied health profession by the American Medical Association in 1990. We acknowledge that work-life balance is not unique to athletic trainers and our profession; however, the nature of our job does result in some unique causative factors. In 1986, Capel⁴ found that role conflict, role ambiguity, locus of control, number of hours in direct contact with patients, and number of patients in the athletic trainer's direct care were significantly related to burnout, an antecedent contributing to career departure.^{5,6} In recent years, the multifactorial nature of the work-life interface has been explored in the literature,^{3,7} and the effects of societal (gender ideology, cultural norms), organizational (work hours, organizational culture), and individual (sex, personality) factors on numerous individual- and organizational-level outcomes, including work-life balance, turnover, and job performance, have been studied.

Over the last decade, we have learned that every athletic trainer, at some point in his or her career, likely faces challenges with work-life balance, regardless of

sex or marital or family status. In a recent systematic review,⁸ burnout was observed in all subsets of the athletic training population, including students, graduate assistants, staff, and faculty. We do, however, know that different causative factors may be responsible for the challenges, which can include various personality traits, societal norms, and the ideologies associated with gender roles (pressure for men to be the breadwinner or women feeling guilty about not being at home). Athletic trainers work in a variety of settings, yet work-life balance challenges occur. Although the factors contributing to the challenges may be setting dependent, conflicts result.

The need for more research stems from potential negative outcomes such as job burnout, job dissatisfaction, and turnover, as they are likely to have indirect effects on patient care. Moreover, athletic trainers' inability to find balance has implications for their personal lives, as they experience guilt for not being able to give as much to their nonwork roles, especially parenting. As investigators, we have only scratched the surface of the work-life interface phenomenon and recognize that there is more to learn and understand. A special issue dedicated to this research is a testament to the importance of the topic.

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