

William E. "Pinky" Newell Memorial Address
Eastern Athletic Trainers' Association Annual Meeting
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Thank you, Mr. Weakley for that kind introduction, and for Johnson & Johnson's sponsorship of this annual address that honors the father of modern athletic training, Mr. Pinky Newell. A special thanks to President Thompson and the Executive Board of the EATA for the invitation to give this year's address. I follow many distinguished members of our profession who have given this address, and I hope I am up to the challenge.

I am especially honored to be here, for two reasons. First, I was born and raised, in both a literal and professional sense, in the Eastern Athletic Trainers' Association. I began as an athletic training student at Castleton State College, and spent the first 10 years of my career in the EATA. I've always been impressed with the outstanding leaders in the EATA, and the progressive and critical manner with which you consider the most important issues facing our profession. You, the membership of the EATA, have been leaders in our profession since the creation of the Eastern Conference Athletic Trainers Association in 1948, two years before establishment of the National Athletic Trainers' Association.

The second and more important reason I am honored to be here is to help honor Pinky Newell. I am old enough to have known Mr. Newell. I recall working a track meet in Pitt Stadium in 1977, in my first job, and Mr. Newell had traveled to the event with the Purdue track team. I remember

standing beside him and talking about the profession and my career aspirations. I was amazed such an important person would take such an interest in a rookie athletic trainer like me.

My topic this evening is one for which I have a great deal of passion: diversity in our profession. One might wonder why I have such an interest in diversity. After all, I was born and raised in the second whitest state in the country, Vermont; second only to Maine in whiteness. Perhaps it was the manner in which I was raised. My parents had a strong sense of tolerance for others, and their influence in this regard was strong. As a young boy, my use of the “N” word would have drawn the same action by my mother as use of the “F” word, a mouth full of soapy water. My older siblings marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during the civil rights movement. I was too young to participate, but was heavily influenced by their action. My home state of Vermont was the first to outlaw slavery, and more recently the first to legalize civil unions; two progressive acts which make me very proud to call myself a native Vermonter.

What does it mean to be a diverse profession? The basic definition of diversity is the state of being different. Diversity means inclusiveness, being accepting of people who are different from you. To become more diverse as a profession is to become more inclusive and accepting of colleagues, athletes, and patients regardless of color, national origin, race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation.

How are we doing with respect to ethnic diversity? The NATA’s web page reports 87% of the certified membership is Caucasian, 1% black, 2%

Hispanic, and 3% Asian or Pacific Islander. The remaining members are unspecified. The current population of the United States is approximately 26% people of color. The NCAA reports approximately 35% of all athletes in all divisions are of color, and essentially half of division I football and men's and women's basketball players are African-American. How are we doing? In my opinion, not very well. During the keynote address at this past year's annual meeting, I sat among several thousand colleagues, and I could count on one hand the number of minority athletic trainers within my field of vision. Our keynote speaker was a prominent African-American woman, Dr. Bertice Berry, an award-winning lecturer, stand-up comedian, doctor of sociology, and host of USA Live. I wondered what must have been going through her mind as she gazed over the audience while delivering her speech.

The challenge of under representation of ethnic minorities in our profession is not new. In a 1968 issue of the athletic training journal, Executive Secretary Jack Rockwell wrote this: "With newspaper and magazine articles telling of requests for black coaches and black trainers at our various places across the country, we find ourselves faced with two questions. The first is, why aren't there more black athletic trainers now working in all phases of athletics today? It is not because of any single or significant reasons, but it must be remedied." With 1% of our certified membership comprised of African-American athletic trainers, we appear to have made only minimal progress in finding the remedy.

This leads me to the question, why are we having such difficulty attracting minority students to our profession? Have we created, or permitted to exist,

an unwelcoming environment? In the NATA's 50th year commemorative history book, *Far Beyond the Shoe Box*, former chair of the Ethnic Diversity Advisory Council, Rene Shingles, proposed this as a potential reason: "When you look at African-Americans in particular, African-Americans are predominantly in and around the urban centers in the U.S. or in the South. And many of those urban or rural schools do not have athletic trainers. Therefore, students are not aware of athletic training as a profession."

Other reasons have been proposed for the difficulty we are having attracting ethnic minorities to our profession as well. We must increase our efforts to solve this dilemma.

Being a diverse profession means more than just being ethnically diverse. How about the manner in which we interact with colleagues, athletes and patients who might be different from ourselves in other ways? Do we contribute to a welcoming environment? This past fall Rice University's football coach was quoted as saying in a story about homophobia in college sports, that while he would not necessarily kick a player off the team for being gay, he probably would think hard about doing so. OK, you might say, that's a football coach, what do you expect? Let me tell you about an article that appeared in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* two months ago. It was titled "The Loneliest Athletes", and was about the homophobia that exists in college athletic departments. One gay cross country runner at a west coast university was quoted in the article as saying he "...faced some awkward moments in the training room, where trainers and athletes in other sports use terms like "sissy" and "pussy" a lot." Can you imagine visiting a physician, physical therapist, or nurse's office where this kind of language is used by a

health care provider, or tolerated by anyone in that setting? How I wish this athlete had been quoted as saying that in spite of the homophobic atmosphere in his athletic department, the athletic training room was a safe haven, creating a welcoming and respectful environment for all men and women, regardless of sexual orientation.

Are we too complacent about the issue of diversity in athletic training? I wrote an editorial on diversity in the *Journal of Athletic Training* two years ago. Over 20,000 of our members receive the Journal. I don't know if this editorial had any impact. I do know I received one letter (from the mother of an African-American undergraduate athletic training student), one e-mail message (from a physically challenged student wanting to become an ATC), and one comment in passing from an African-American colleague. Three responses from over 20,000 members? I think we are being too complacent about diversity in athletic training.

At this point, you may be saying to yourself, Ok, Perrin, you apparently talk the talk, but do you walk the walk. I try to walk the walk, and let me give you some examples. At the University of Virginia I received a flyer in the mail inviting faculty to become involved in a new mentoring program for minority students. I could have tossed the flyer in the trash like so many of my colleagues likely did, but I didn't. I got involved. I became the Office of African-American Affairs inaugural faculty mentor of the year, and was the co-recipient of the same award the second year. I am as proud of these awards as any of the athletic training honors I have received in my career.

Another example. I have recently submitted a grant proposal to the Ethnic Diversity Advisory Council entitled “Increasing diversity through entry-level graduate athletic training education”. The project proposes to establish a partnership between the increasing numbers of accredited entry-level graduate athletic training education programs and the 116 historically black colleges and universities throughout the country. The primary mission of the project will be to recruit, retain, and educate ethnically diverse athletic training students.

A final example. As a senior level administrator in the UNC system, I was recently asked to make a leadership level gift to the employees combined capital campaign for the Greater Greensboro United Way, and as a dean was expected to encourage the faculty and staff in my school to contribute to the same cause. I pointed out to the Dean’s Council of the university that the local chapter of the Boy Scouts of America is a United Way agency, and that the Boy Scouts is exclusionary and discriminatory in its policy against gay youth. The Boy Scouts have many positive attributes, but unfortunately they teach a very early lesson to youth about how to discriminate against those who might be different than oneself. My stance led to the public disclosure of an anti-discriminatory statement being written by the local chapter of the United Way in response to the policy of the Boy Scouts.

I cite these examples both within and outside of our profession not to boast. Rather, I want to provide examples of how we can try to make the environment in which we live and work more diverse; more inclusive and accepting of others who might be different.

What can you do to promote diversity within athletic training? Let me provide some specific examples.

If you are an athletic training student, recruit a minority classmate to explore athletic training as a career option. If you are an athletic trainer for a professional sport, contact the guidance department at an inner city high school, and offer to provide a field trip of your work setting. Encourage your team's management to provide financial support to the NATA's scholarship program for minority students. If you are a high school athletic trainer, recruit minority students in athletic training through workshops and career days. Counsel interested students to follow a program of study in high school that will strengthen their credentials for an accredited athletic training program in a college or university. If you are a college or university athletic training educator, follow the lead of the more traditional disciplines and incorporate multicultural education into your athletic training curriculum. You will produce an athletic training professional who is more tolerant of others with respect to ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, and religion.

We should also take very seriously the recommendations of our colleagues on the Ethnic Diversity Advisory Council. If you haven't yet, visit their web site. They recommend several excellent strategies for increasing diversity in our profession.

The Eastern Athletic Trainers' Association is known for the progressive and critical manner with which it considers the most important issues facing our profession. If each and everyone one of you accepts the challenge of increasing diversity in our profession, and makes a conscious decision to try

and do something about it, the EATA can as it has in the past, lead the way for our profession. Increasing diversity in athletic training will not happen overnight. Four months before his death in 1984, Pinky Newell closed his keynote address at the 35th annual clinical symposium in Nashville with these words that I think apply to our challenge of increasing diversity in athletic training: “On a day-to-day basis, the changes in our Association in the future will be neither dramatic or sudden. Their impact will be historical, not contemporary. They will come if we exercise the kind of wisdom, prolonged effort, and patience that go with looking ahead to what the profession and the Association will be ten years or even another thirty-five years from now. We must work diligently and honestly for what many of us may not live to see. Perhaps this is all any man can really mean when he says: I have a dream...”.

Thank you very much.