

National Provider Identifier (NPI): Importance to the Athletic Training Profession?

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My expectation is that the National Provider Identifier (NPI) is not news to you. If this assumption is correct, then one out of every two of you have not grasp the importance of the NPI to the profession of Athletic Training, or to yourself. Why do I say that? Well, according to NATA's database, iMIS, currently only 52% of active ATs have their NPI.

So, you say, "What is the big deal. I am an athletic trainer working in a secondary school, college/university, administrative or even a healthcare setting with no intentions of billing for services I am providing. Fifty-two percent seems pretty good to me, as I am sure that covers the percentage of ATs working in settings that are interested in billing third parties for services provided".

If those or similar thoughts, went through your mind after the first paragraph, let's do some review.

All of the following information was gathered from www.cigna.com.

What is the NPI, and why was it created in the first place?

The National Provider Identifier (NPI) is a unique identification number for use in standard health care transactions. It is issued to **health care professionals** and covered entities that transmit standard HIPAA electronic transactions (e.g., electronic claims and claim status inquiries).

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) began issuing NPIs to **health care professionals** who applied and qualified in May 2005. **Health care professionals** and covered entities may apply for NPIs through the National Plan and Provider Enumeration System (NPPES) established by CMS for this purpose.

The NPI fulfills a requirement of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), and was to be used by health plans and health care clearinghouses for HIPAA standard electronic transactions beginning May 23, 2007. Health care professionals and covered entities were given an additional year to become fully compliant with the NPI rule. The contingency period expired May 23, 2008.

The NPI is intended to:

- Replace other identifiers previously used by health care professionals and assigned by payers (e.g., Unique Physician Identification Number [UPIN], Medicare or Medicaid numbers);
- Establish a national standard and unique identifier for all health care professionals
- Simplify health care system administration
- Encourage the electronic transmission of health care information

So my question to you, is the above mentioned not what everyone in the Athletic Training profession is striving for, regardless of setting – recognition as **health care professionals**? It would seem that 100% of active ATs would want an NPI to improve the brand of the AT as a **health care professional** regardless of the practice setting.

Secondly, seeking recognition as health care professionals is a numbers game. When seeking recognition from CMS, other health care insurers, as well as federal legislators, the question comes up as to just how large is the organization. How many health care professionals are we talking about? For comparative purposes, the following are estimated numbers of health care professional colleagues:

Medical Doctors - 954,000
Nurse Practitioners - 106,100
Physician Assistants - 70,400
Physical Therapists - 198,600
Occupational Therapists - 108,800

Compare to AT:

Athletic Trainers - 42,000 (30,455 NATA members, remainder are non-members)

Given that nearly 100% of the health care professional colleagues listed have a NPI, it is very simple for the federal system to determine their size, and perceptually, their impact. With athletic trainers, our lobbyists & governmental affairs activists tell the story of our size, and potential impact, but there is not an objective means available since only 52% of our profession has an NPI. This, combined with being significantly smaller than any of these comparative colleagues, makes our story for recognition weak. Getting ATs closer to 100% enrolled with NPI will only strengthen our case.

Finally, recognition of ATs by insurers as health care professionals affects us all, regardless of practice setting. College/university sports medicine and athletic programs are looking for additional revenue due to the economy and funding cut-backs. Secondary school athletic trainers with squeezed budgets are looking to insurer payment opportunities. Athletic trainers working in professional sports and performing arts have opportunities to treat and bill for Workers' Compensation. Plus there are athletic trainers working in health systems, rehabilitation clinics and physician offices, all of which are receiving pressure to justify their value and/or generate revenue. Additionally, recognition can potentially lead to other types of insurers or corporations, i.e., Workers' Compensation, Third Party Administrators and/or corporations, realizing the true value of AT and eventually pay for prevention, wellness & education. Having an NPI is important for this recognition!

So, my question for you – “What else can you do for your profession, and yourself, that is free, takes less than 20 minutes, needs to be done only one time lasting a lifetime and truly has a national impact for your profession? I cannot think of anything. Can you?”.

How a *health care provider* may apply for an NPI:

- Apply through a web-based application process. Access the web address through NATA to apply for an NPI number at <http://www.nata.org/NPI>.
- Also, the NATA has a step by step process along with the pictures to insure that obtaining your NPI number is as easy as possible. To see the directions please visit: <http://www.nata.org/sites/default/files/Apply-NPI-Number.pdf>

Finally, do you know there are two types of NPI - which NPI is right for you?

There are two types of NPIs: Type 1, for individual health care providers and Type 2 for incorporated businesses, such as group practices and clinics.

Type 1 is for the provider. This is the only type of NPI you will need if you receive payments in your name or under your social security number as a solo practitioner. For practices with multiple providers, obtain a Type 1 NPI for each dentist.

Type 2 is for group practices, incorporated medical/rehabilitation practices or other business entities paid under their business or corporate name, or under their employer identification number (EIN).

On claims, the Type 2 NPI identifies the payee, and may be submitted in conjunction with a Type 1 NPI to identify the medical provider who provided the treatment.