



## **Policy Statement:**

# **Dry Needling is Acupuncture in Alaska**

Jan-2017

**Alaska Licensed Acupuncturists are recognized by the division of Occupational Licensing and are authorized to use acupuncture needles in the practice of Acupuncture.**

**The Acupuncture Association of Alaska hereby places a position that the practice of Dry Needling (DN), Myofascial Trigger point needling and/or Intramuscular Stimulation (IMS) should not be performed by anyone other than a Licensed Acupuncturist and/or Medical Doctor with a certification in Medical Acupuncture.**

The Acupuncture Association of Alaska is the state's professional organization of Licensed Acupuncturists. The purpose of our group is to protect the health, welfare and public interest of Alaskans in relationship to their access to the practice of Acupuncture in this state. In addition to providing continuing education for its membership, it is the Association's mandate to educate the public regarding the nature and scope of the practice of Acupuncture & East Asian Medicine.

- **The Acupuncture Association of Alaska hereby takes the position that the practice of “Dry Needling” is acupuncture.**
- **It is mandated that only Licensed Acupuncturists or Medical Doctors certified in medical acupuncture are able to perform Acupuncture.**
- **Anyone who practices acupuncture or dry needling without the required training, as defined by state and federal regulations, is practicing acupuncture without a license.**
- **It should not be performed by anyone who lacks sufficient training and certification to insert acupuncture needles.**
- **Therefore, Acupuncture should be done by adequately trained and certified providers.**

Acupuncture for Alaska is now working on behalf of Acupuncturists in Alaska who have become concerned about physical therapists practicing a form of acupuncture and calling it "dry needling". Dry needling (DN) done by minimally trained, non-certified practitioners is dangerous, and has the potential of causing great harm and injury to the public.

## **Alaska Acupuncture Statutes and Regulations**

<https://www.commerce.alaska.gov/web/portals/5/pub/AcupunctureStatutes.pdf>

**Sec. 08.06.010. Practice of acupuncture without license prohibited.** A person may not practice acupuncture without a license.

**Sec. 08.06.030. License to practice acupuncture.** (a) A person is qualified to receive a license to practice acupuncture if the person

- (1) is of good moral character;
- (2) is at least 21 years of age;
- (3) either

(A) **has completed a course of study consistent with the core curriculum and guidelines of the National Council of Acupuncture Schools and Colleges at a school of acupuncture approved by the department; or**

(B) is licensed to practice acupuncture in another jurisdiction that has acupuncture licensing requirements equivalent to those of this state;

(4) **is qualified for certification by the National Commission for the Certification of Acupuncturists as a diplomate in acupuncture;**

**Sec. 08.06.190. Definitions.** In this chapter

(1) **“acupuncture”** means a form of healing developed from traditional Chinese medical concepts that **uses the stimulation of certain points on or near the surface of the body by the insertion of needles** to prevent or modify the perception of pain or to normalize physiological functions;

(2) **“department”** means the Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development;

(3) **“Practice of acupuncture”** means **the insertion of sterile acupuncture needles** and the application of moxibustion to specific areas of the human body based upon acupuncture diagnosis; the

practice of acupuncture includes adjunctive therapies involving mechanical, thermal, electrical, and electromagnetic treatment and the recommendation of dietary guidelines and therapeutic exercise.

## **What is Acupuncture?**

Acupuncture is a procedure with the insertion of a sterile, stainless steel filiform needle. This necessitates that the practitioner needling has been properly trained and have enough experience to perform safe and clean technique.

Acupuncture uses the stimulation of certain points on or near the surface of the body by insertion of acupuncture needles. Acupuncture Physical Medicine is a modern term used to perform an ancient practice that predates dry needling, myofascial trigger point needling and intramuscular stimulation (IMS). The traditional term is Ah-shi point, (pronounced ah-sure) translated literally as “Yes, that’s it” or “the painful point.” There is a reaction when Ah-shi points are stimulated by acupuncture needles. These points are not acupoints on any actual meridian, but they are used regularly and are considered a standard of practice to treat painful areas and muscle tension. Used alone or in conjunction with known acupuncture points, it is painless and a very effective Acupuncture treatment using very small 34-40 gauge needles.

## **Clarification of Dry Needling and Acupuncture Point Terminology**

There is controversy regarding the definition of dry needling. Licensed medical physicians and Licensed Acupuncturists consider dry needling as Western Style Acupuncture or Trigger Point Acupuncture whereby the insertion sites are determined by tender painful areas and tight muscles. These sites may be treated alone or in combination with known acupuncture points. Dry needling claims to be different from acupuncture, in that it is not a holistic procedure and does not use meridians or other Eastern medicine paradigms to determine the insertion sites.

Acupuncture for Alaska maintains that dry needling is acupuncture by the following reference from Council of Colleges of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine Position Paper on Dry Needling: [http://www.ccaom.org/downloads/CCAOM\\_Position\\_Paper\\_\\_May\\_2011\\_Update.pdf](http://www.ccaom.org/downloads/CCAOM_Position_Paper__May_2011_Update.pdf)

*Dry needling is an acupuncture technique As a system of treatment for pain, acupuncture relies on a category of points derived from the Chinese language as “ashi” (阿是) points. “Ashi” point theory describes the same physiological phenomenon identified as “trigger points,” a phrase coined by Dr Janet Travell, et al and dates to the Tang Dynasty (618-907). While Dr. Travell coined the phrase “trigger point”, the physiological phenomenon has been long known to acupuncturists. Dr. Travell herself had contact with acupuncturists and chiropractors interested in acupuncture in the Los Angeles area in the 1980s. Dr. Mark Seem, author of A New American Acupuncture, discussed the similarity of their techniques in the 1990s. Modern contributors from the field of acupuncture in the specialization of dry needling techniques are:*

- *Dr. Mark Seem, Ph. D., L. Ac., published the textbook A New American Acupuncture covering the topic of dry needling in 1993. His books have been published for over two decades.*
- *Matt Callison, L. Ac., is the founder of the Sports Medicine Acupuncture® certification program and the author of Motor Points Index. The continuing education certification program is available to licensed acupuncturists through a private seminar company and through postgraduate studies at the New England School of Acupuncture.*
- *Whitfield Reaves, L. Ac. is the author of The Acupuncture Handbook of Sports Injuries and Pain: A Four Step Approach to Treatment. He also offers a 3 postgraduate continuing education program in Sports Acupuncture only for licensed acupuncturists.*

## Differences in the training & certification of needle insertion.

Licensed Acupuncturists	Medical Acupuncturists (MD's)	Dry Needling by Physical Therapists
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 660-870 hours of hands-on, supervised training in the use of needles. In addition to 12451755 hours of training, diagnosis, biomedicine, ethics, and other topics</li> <li>• Required continuing education of 30 units every two years. - National Board Certification in acupuncture after attending an accredited school</li> <li>• Alaska State license to practice Acupuncture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 200 hours of formal approved education, consisting of 120 hours of didactic education and 80 hours of clinical training. An additional 20 hours and two years of clinical acupuncture practice are required to meet eligibility for Full Practice Membership.</li> <li>• AAMA affirms the necessity of 50 hours of approved continuing education in acupuncture every three years for continued membership.</li> <li>• Board Certification to recognize those physicians who have obtained 300 hours of medical acupuncture training, successfully passed an examination and have two or more years of clinical Acupuncture experience.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 27-72 hours of training in the use of needles, in addition to hours required to obtain Physical Therapy license.</li> <li>• About ½ of the training hours for dry needling are hands on. A portion of these hours may be online or home-study.</li> <li>• Continuing education is not mandatory in dry needling</li> <li>• Certification not required by PT board to perform dry needling.</li> <li>• No registration or listing with state board who is certified.</li> </ul>

## Supporting Policy Statements for “Dry Needling is Acupuncture”

### American Medical Association policy statement (July 2016)

<https://searchpf.ama-assn.org/SearchML/searchDetails.action?uri=%2FAMADoc%2FHOD-410.949.xml>

#### ***Regulating Dry Needling***

*The AMA adopted a policy that said physical therapists and other non-physicians practicing dry needling should – at a minimum – have standards that are similar to the ones for training, certification and continuing education that exist for acupuncture.*

*"Lax regulation and nonexistent standards surround this invasive practice. For patients' safety, practitioners should meet standards required for licensed acupuncturists and physicians," AMA Board Member Russell W. H. Kridel, M.D.*

### The American Association of Medical Acupuncturists holds a position statement on dry needling:

<http://www.medicalacupuncture.org/Portals/2/PDFs/AAMADryNeedlingPolicyOct15.pdf>

*...To include dry needling into the scope of practice by physical therapists is unnecessarily exposing the public to serious and potentially hazardous risks. Because of this we feel a duty to inform legislators and regulating bodies about the inherent danger to the public of this practice. Therefore, the AAMA strongly believes that, for the health and safety of the public, this procedure should be performed only by practitioners with extensive training and familiarity with routine use of needles in their practice and who are duly licensed to perform these procedures, such as licensed medical physicians or licensed acupuncturists. In our experience and medical opinion, it is inadvisable legally to expand the scope of physical therapists to include dry needling as part of their practice.*

### The Council of Colleges of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine holds a position statement on dry needling by Acupuncturists:

[http://www.ccaom.org/downloads/CCAOM\\_Position\\_Paper\\_May\\_2011\\_Update.pdf](http://www.ccaom.org/downloads/CCAOM_Position_Paper_May_2011_Update.pdf)

*... It is the position of the Council of Colleges of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (CCAOM) that dry needling is an acupuncture technique.*

*...It is the position of the CCAOM that any intervention utilizing dry needling is the practice of acupuncture, regardless of the language utilized in describing the technique.*

### **... Documented practice of “dry needling” by Acupuncturists**

*The National Commission for the Certification of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM), the certifying board for acupuncture, completed a job task analysis in 2003 and again in 2008. The analysis documented the prevalence of actual use of dry needling techniques, i.e. the treatment of trigger points or motor points with acupuncture needles, by practicing acupuncturists. In 2003, 82% of Acupuncturists surveyed used needling of trigger points in patients that presented with pain. Of the patients that present for acupuncture treatment, it is estimated that 56% present with trigger point pain. The others present for non-pain conditions such as non-trigger point pain, digestive disorders, infertility and many other conditions. The other 18% of acupuncturists used acupuncture needling techniques in non-trigger point locations. These findings document that acupuncturists are well trained to use and have consistent historical usage of trigger and motor point “dry needling” treatment. Dry needling represents a substantial daily practice among American acupuncturists.*

### **Regarding the use of FDA controlled Acupuncture needles the AAMA holds this position:**

<http://www.medicalacupuncture.org/ForPhysicians/AbouttheAAMA/AAMAPositionStatement.aspx>.

#### **... Needles and Devices**

*AAMA recognizes the importance of acupuncture needles and other tools in the practice of acupuncture. AAMA emphasizes the necessity of aseptic, sterile or clean technique as would be appropriate for any other tool or device used in the practice of medicine.*

*The AAMA recognizes that the use of needles by appropriately trained personnel should present a real, although very infrequent, risk to the patient with respect to tissue or visceral trauma or infection. Appropriate training is essential to provide the public with practitioners who may provide competent care with minimal risk to the patient.*

*The use of acupuncture needles has included millions of needle placements with a remarkably low incidence of risk to patients and practitioners. As such, the AAMA commends the FDA's reclassification of acupuncture needles to Class II medical devices for use by appropriately trained practitioners.*

### **“Acupuncture should be done by Acupuncturists”**

1. It has already been determined by Alaska State Law that Acupuncturists are the professionals who are licensed and have the authority to perform needling. The terminology is different between Acupuncture and dry needling, but the techniques and tools used are exactly Acupuncture.
2. Traditionally Physical Therapists are not trained in the use of needles. This marks a separation from traditional standards of practice. Referring providers to physical therapy are most likely unaware that their patients are being needled. According to the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA), dry needling is the insertion of filiform needles to penetrate the skin and stimulate underlying myofascial trigger points, muscular tissues, and connective tissues for the management of neuromuscular pain and movement impairments. Dry needling is also known as Myofascial Trigger Point

needling and Intramuscular Stimulation (IMS). This is acupuncture technique as stated exactly in Alaska Acupuncture statutes. Dry needling is an invasive procedure,, and any invasive procedure has associated and potentially serious medical risks. It is safe, only if performed by a properly educated, trained, licensed and experienced health professional. It is critical to understand that dry needling, in the hands of minimally educated practitioners can cause extreme harm.

3. Acupuncture is considered a safe procedure with low risk of serious complications. Risks are directly related to the amount of training the practitioner has undergone and decrease with increased hours of required training. It has been identified that over the course of one year the cases of pneumothorax due to dry needling had increased. This was in conjunction with the increase in physical therapists performing the procedure over the same time span. [www.acupuncturesafety.org](http://www.acupuncturesafety.org)
4. Clean Needle Technique Certification should be mandated if there is dry needling done by Physical Therapists. It is required of Acupuncturists before they can enter into clinical practice in school, take National exams, and needle the public. There is no clean needle certification by PT's to perform dry needling. This is an OSHA standard required of Acupuncturists and practitioners who do dry needling should be subject to the same standards if an Acupuncture needle or filiform needle is inserted.  
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22256654>  
Clean Needle Technique Course Content  
[http://www.ccaom.org/pdf/NEW\\_On-line\\_Content.pdf](http://www.ccaom.org/pdf/NEW_On-line_Content.pdf)
5. The public safety concern continues in respect to a patient's medical condition. Acupuncture is a comprehensive medical approach, whereas, DN is primarily focused upon musculoskeletal disorders, and is not looking holistically at the complete person. The concern for public safety mounts that significant medical details may be missing to determine if a patient should actually be needled. Licensed Acupuncturists are trained extensively to identify the appropriate indications and contraindication to needles and if a patient is unable to be needled, they apply non-needle therapies or provide referral. Acupuncturists are well versed in the implications of needling.
6. There are misperceptions by the general public that dry needling is Acupuncture. The public is experiencing difficulty discerning the differences. Patient's reports solicited by practitioners are that it is very painful, leaves bruises, and that patients have had to ask PT's to stop the procedure due to pain.
7. Patients are nervous and becoming afraid of Acupuncture because of their experiences when dry needled. It was so painful that they will not seek Acupuncture treatment. The

perception of pain associated with DN is diminishing and undermining the painless and effective practice of Acupuncture. There is also advertising by Physical Therapy clinics misrepresenting dry needling with the use of Acupuncture pictures.

8. Acupuncture statutes do prohibit anyone other than an Acupuncturist to insert needles. There is no physical therapy statute that allows for the practice of dry needling in Alaska. Since 2011 Physical therapists have asked the Physical Therapy Board for clarification on the inclusion of dry needling within a physical therapist's scope of practice. The board has shown its reluctance to regulate dry needling from a PT standpoint saying that the statutes don't prohibit dry needling. Despite the issue of the practice of dry needling coming before the Alaska State Physical Therapy board for 6 years in a row there still has not been an effort to regulate or interpret the law.
9. As of September 2016 the consistent statement from the Physical therapy board for the past six years is as follows....

*The board stands, in regard to performance of dry needling, the board will not address specific treatment approaches by licensure; however, they expect the professionalism of the clinician to determine if they are qualified to provide the type of treatment in question or whether referral is more appropriate. The physical therapist will be held accountable for demonstrating this competence if there is ever a complaint.*

[https://www.commerce.alaska.gov/web/Portals/5/pub/PHY\\_Minutes\\_2016\\_09.pdf](https://www.commerce.alaska.gov/web/Portals/5/pub/PHY_Minutes_2016_09.pdf)

September 2016

10. A survey in December 2015 of comments from patient experiences on dry needling are outlined below.

*...New patient in the office reports that they went to a PT and received dry needling. Afterwards they had to go to emergency room because they developed a pneumothorax.*

*...61-year old woman with shoulder pain: "I had dry needling done at Physical Therapy and I almost passed out. She bent my needles and my whole shoulder would get bruised. She put needles into knots and hooked up electrodes to make the muscles twitch and then would go to the next set of knots. It was horrible. I got nauseated and almost passed out. I asked her to stop."*

*... We have several patients who have experienced dry-needling in PT's offices, and the main thing that these patients say is that the dry-needling therapy is a lot more painful than acupuncture.*

*...there are safety concerns, I have talked to probably 10-15 people who have had dry needling while receiving PT. Every one of them complains about pain from the procedure, I do not recall anyone stating they benefited and several believed what they received was acupuncture. When there was no benefit, they assumed acupuncture was not effective. This is on multiple levels a*



*disservice to patients, and added medical expenses for a treatment that appears to have minimal clinical benefit.*

*...Patient reported to Acupuncturist that they received dry needling by a PT. Afterward she was ill and remained in bed for two days with severe pain. The patient stated that she always feels good after Acupuncture.*

## **SUMMARY**

**The Acupuncture Association of Alaska here by places the policy Dry needling is Acupuncture in Alaska. The use of acupuncture needles or filiform needles is Acupuncture.**

1. Acupuncture, as mandated by Alaska State law, is to be performed by those that have fulfilled the requirements for Acupuncture licensure.
2. Alaskans who seek the out the traditional practices of Acupuncture and East Asian medicine modalities need to have full disclosure and education regarding the practices of needling, the education, training and certification of practitioners that are putting needles in them. The invasive nature of needle insertion and the public's general fear of needles predisposes for misinterpretation of acupuncture and dry needling because of the differences in technique.
3. Public safety for patients receiving acupuncture is not to be taken lightly. It poses significant risk of harm and injury to the public if the insertion of acupuncture needles is performed by no one other than a Licensed Acupuncturists and Medical Acupuncturists to use. Physical therapists who are practicing dry needling have minimal training in needle insertion, have no accredited certification process, no clean needle certification, nor regulation and are practicing acupuncture without a license.
4. Acupuncture and Physical Therapy are adjunctive and complementary disciplines and should treat each profession as such. We ask that PT's perform excellence in traditional PT practices without dry needling and work collaboratively with Acupuncturists to achieve the safest and best outcomes for the patient.

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## References

Alaska Acupuncture Statutes

<http://www.commerce.alaska.gov/web/portals/5/pub/AcupunctureStatutes.pdf>

American Medical Association policy statement in July 2016:

<https://searchpf.ama-assn.org/SearchML/searchDetails.action?uri=%2FAMADoc%2FHOD-410.949.xml>

AAMA Position State on Dry Needling

<http://www.medicalacupuncture.org/Portals/2/PDFs/AAMADryNeedlingPolicyOct15.pdf>

AAMA Training Guidelines in Medical Acupuncture

<http://www.medicalacupuncture.org/ForPhysicians/AbouttheAAMA/AAMAPositionStatement.aspx>

Council of Colleges for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine: Dry Needling is Acupuncture

[http://www.ccaom.org/downloads/CCAOM\\_Position\\_Paper\\_May\\_2011\\_Update.pdf](http://www.ccaom.org/downloads/CCAOM_Position_Paper_May_2011_Update.pdf)

National Center for Acupuncture Safety & Integrity

<http://acupuncturesafety.org/> [http://acupuncturesafety.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/NCASI\\_10\\_Key\\_Facts\\_8.5x11\\_Brochure.pdf](http://acupuncturesafety.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/NCASI_10_Key_Facts_8.5x11_Brochure.pdf)

<http://tryacupuncture.org/acupuncture-vs-dry-needling.pdf>

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22256654>

Clean Needle Technique Course Content

[http://www.ccaom.org/pdf/NEW\\_On-line\\_Content.pdf](http://www.ccaom.org/pdf/NEW_On-line_Content.pdf)

Dry Needling Terminology

<http://acupuncturewisconsin.org/dry-needling-10-facts-you-should-know-2/>

What you must know about dry needling from an Acupuncturist who took a dry needling course.

<http://www.liveoakacupuncture.com/dry-needling>