

Opinion

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Dry Needling: A Potential Crisis for Acupuncture Profession



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Opinion

Current practice and education of Dry Needling remind us what happened to acupuncture in early 1970s in the USA. Due to lack of legal regulations, anyone could claim himself or herself as an acupuncturist and some unregulated commercial courses offered to train anyone in a weekend to become an acupuncturist. With the efforts of many, including professional, patients, and legislation exports, the problem has been largely resolved by establishing laws of acupuncture in the States. Now, over 90% of the states in the USA have their own specific acupuncture laws and regulations, which guarantee the safety and prosperity of acupuncture profession. It is well known that the first law of acupuncture in the West was established in the USA and America has the best regulated acupuncture practice in the world.

Unfortunately, that reputation is about to change due to the appearance of a "new practice" called

Dry Needling by non-acupuncturists and physicians. Here are some points about Dry Needling that medical professionals, patients, and legislation authorities should know: Dry Needling is currently practiced mainly by physical therapists, chiropractors and others healthcare practitioners without appropriate acupuncture licensure and therefore it poses a risk to public health and may mislead the public perception of the practice of acupuncture.

Dry Needling involves the insertion of filiform acupuncture needles into Trigger Points following by rotating and/or pressing and lifting the needles to provide pain relief or other musculoskeletal benefits. Although under a different name, Dry Needling is nearly identical to some approaches of traditional acupuncture, which has over 2000 years history. Targeting Trigger Points for the treatment of pain is the protocol of Ashi Point therapy in acupuncture practice based on the theory of Chinese medicine. Published evidence indicates that 92% of the Trigger Points of Dry Needling overlap with either Ashi Points or classical acupuncture points. There is no credible data supporting that Dry Needling is a new discovery in medicine or that it is distinct in any meaningful way from acupuncture. Dry Needling should therefore be considered a sub practice of

acupuncture. Most international and American acupuncture societies recognize diverse variants of needling techniques and protocols based on different schools of needling theories. These variants all fall under the umbrella of acupuncture and Dry Needling should be no exception.

The practice of acupuncture is regulated by specific laws in the United States and many other countries. Like any acupuncturist, a practitioner of Dry Needling must follow the regulation of acupuncture as well as WHO Guidelines on Basic Training and Safety in Acupuncture. To ensure public safety and welfare, practitioners should be properly trained, educated and legally licensed. The practice of acupuncture, like any other specialty of medicine, is a complex subject. It cannot be learned simply by attending to one or a few weekends courses, such as the case in current popular. Dry Needling training courses. The potential risk of patient injury necessitates the strict enforcement of standards in education and training before any person engages in the insertion of acupuncture needles into a patient. Additional harm on the public in the form of damage to the reputation of acupuncture as a safe and effective medical therapy, and thereby dissuading patients that would benefit from acupuncture away should also be deeply concerned.

Finally, more research is needed about the efficacy and safety of Dry Needling. Related professional organizations should offer professional assistance and consulting services to its members, local departments of acupuncture administration, educational and research institutes, and professional individuals on the issues of acupuncture and Dry Needling. Dry needling should be included in current and future definition of acupuncture in medical legislation and education.

In sum, acupuncture is one of best regulated professions in alternative medicine in the USA as a result of nearly half a century's effort of legalization. Current booming of Dry Needling practice by non-acupuncturists processes a potential crisis for acupuncture profession and the status of acupuncture may be ultimately changed back to 1970s due the misuse of acupuncture in the name of Dry Needling.



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