



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF MEDICAL ACUPUNCTURE ®

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AAMA Policy on Dry-Needling

The American Academy of Medical Acupuncture (AAMA) is the premier North American organization of physician acupuncturists. The AAMA is committed to insuring public health and safety by ensuring that all persons practicing any type of medicine, including acupuncture, are properly trained and educated. It is imperative that courts and medical bodies maintain and preserve strict standards of education and training in acupuncture before any person undertakes inserting a needle into a patient. An ill-trained practitioner could, as a result of lack of education or ignorance, cause substantial medical injury.

Acupuncture, like Western Medicine is a complex subject. It cannot be mastered in a weekend or in a month. All AAMA members, in addition to four (4) years of medical school (MD or DO), must have 300 hours of didactic and clinical acupuncture education and training. In most states, a non-physician must have in excess of 2,000 hours of clinical and didactic education and training before they can become certified to treat patients.

Dry needling, like acupuncture, involves the use of solid needles (contrasted with the use of hollow hypodermic needles that are used for injections) to treat muscle pain by stimulating and breaking muscular knots and bands. Unlike trigger point injections used by physicians and licensed acupuncturists for the same purpose, no anesthetics are used in dry needling. 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. Other practitioners take the position that dry needling is different from acupuncture in that it is not an holistic procedure and does not use meridians or other Eastern medicine paradigms to determine the insertion sites. Regardless of the theory, it is incontrovertible that dry needling is an invasive procedure. Needle length can range up to 4 inches in order to reach the affected muscles. It is critical to understand that dry needling, in the hands of minimally educated practitioners can cause extreme harm. Any invasive procedure has associated and potentially serious medical risks and is safe only if

performed by a properly educated, trained and experienced health professional. The technique of dry needling frequently involves needling of muscular structures that may be deep and/or hidden under layers of other muscles and tissues and close to sensitive structures and organs including blood vessels, nerves and organs as, for example, the lungs. The patient can develop painful bruises after the procedure and adverse sequelae may include hematoma, pneumothorax, nerve injury, vascular injury and infection. Angle the needle incorrectly and, for example, the lung may be punctured. Post procedure analgesic medications may be necessary (usually over the counter medications are sufficient). In the worse case scenario, vital organs can be pierced, resulting in complex medical situations or even death.

Physical therapy is not a field that has historically included the use of needles. The recent trend of some physical therapists to embrace dry needling under the umbrella of physical therapy practice is one that marks a distinct departure from traditional physical therapy practice. The fact that many physical therapists receive only minimal hours of training speaks to the potential danger of their practice.

To include dry needling into the scope of practice by physical therapists is unnecessarily to expose 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.

Unanimously adopted by
AAMA Board of Directors
December 9, 2014

Unanimously re-affirmed by
AAMA Board of Directors
March 21, 2017