



Position Statement

Acupuncture and the Use of Dry Needling Techniques in Physiotherapy

Acupuncture and other techniques using dry needles¹ are interventions included under the scope of practice for physiotherapists in Canada for the treatment of pain and other symptoms of musculoskeletal, neurological and cardio-respiratory disorders, or as a measure to improve functional health status.

BACKGROUND

The practice of physiotherapy focuses on the musculoskeletal, cardio-respiratory and neuromuscular systems. As self-regulated primary care professionals, physiotherapists use clinical reasoning based on initial assessment findings and best available evidence to select the interventions used within their treatment plan. Evaluation of treatment effectiveness is outcomes-based, which informs selection of interventions throughout the duration of treatment.

Acupuncture has been utilized as a physiotherapy intervention in Canada since the 1980s. In recent years, physiotherapists have also incorporated additional dry needling techniques, such as Intra Muscular Stimulation (IMS) within their practice. Physiotherapists are required to adhere to the regulatory requirements for the education and use of these interventions in the jurisdiction(s) in which they practice.

RATIONALE

Acupuncture/dry needling techniques may form part of the physiotherapy treatment plan that is developed through the clinical reasoning process. There is growing evidence that acupuncture/dry needling techniques are effective in the management of both acute and chronic conditions. For example, acupuncture is a useful intervention in a range of conditions including, but not limited to, the treatment of headaches,¹ shoulder pain, carpal tunnel syndrome, osteoarthritis, stroke rehabilitation and some chronic respiratory conditions.² In addition there is evidence to support the use of acupuncture/dry needling techniques as adjuncts to other therapies in the treatment of low back pain.³

¹ Melchart, D., Linde, K., Berman, B., White, A., Vickers, A., Allais, G., Brinkhaus, B. (2006). Acupuncture for idiopathic headache. The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews. Issue 1.

² National Institute of Health. (1997). Acupuncture NIH Consensus Statement. Nov 3-5; 15(5):1-34.

³ Furlan, A.D., van Tulder, M.W., Cherkin, D.C., Tsukayama, H., Lao, L., Koes, B.W., Berman, B.M. (2006). Acupuncture and dry-needling for low back pain. The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews. Issue 1.

CPA supports an evidence-based, best practice approach to the use of acupuncture/ dry needling techniques within physiotherapy practice, and the need for ongoing research to expand the knowledge base behind the effectiveness of these interventions.

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ⁱ The term 'dry needling' refers to therapeutic techniques using solid needles, and does not include injection of a substance into the tissues.