



American Association of  
Acupuncture & Oriental Medicine

## **American Association of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (AAAOM) Position Statement on Trigger Point Dry Needling (TDN) and Intramuscular Manual Therapy (IMT)**

- 1. Acupuncture as a technique is the stimulation of specific anatomical locations on the body, alone or in combination, to treat disease, pain, and dysfunction.**
- 2. Acupuncture as a technique includes the invasive or non-invasive stimulation of said locations by means of needles or other thermal, electrical, light, mechanical or manual therapeutic method.**
- 3. Acupuncture as a field of practice is defined by the study of how the various acupuncture techniques can be applied to health and wellness.**
- 4. Trigger Point Dry Needling and Intramuscular Manual therapy are by definition acupuncture techniques.**
- 5. Trigger Point Dry Needling and Intramuscular Manual Therapy are by definition included in the Field of Acupuncture as a field of practice.**

**The AAAOM endorses the educational standards set for the practice of Acupuncture by the United States Department of Education recognized Accreditation Commission of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (ACAOM).**

**The AAAOM endorses the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE)'s National Commission on Certifying Agencies (NCCA) recognized certification standards set forth by the National Certification Commission of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM).**

Recently, it has come to the attention of the AAAOM that regulatory boards have started to recognize Acupuncture by other names, such as “dry needling” and “trigger point dry needling.” Forty-four (six pending) states plus the District of Columbia have already statutorily defined Acupuncture and most have defined the educational and certification standards required for licensure by the widely accepted aforementioned standards. Current medical literature is consistent with the definitions of Acupuncture provided by the state practice acts and the AAAOM, which clearly identifies “dry needling” as Acupuncture.<sup>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13</sup>

Trigger Point Dry Needling and Intramuscular Manual Therapy are re-titlings and re-packagings of a subset of the acupuncture techniques described in the Field of Acupuncture as “*ashi* point needling.” A reasonable English translation of *ashi* points is “trigger points”, a term used by Dr. Janet Travell in her landmark 1983 book *Myofascial Pain Dysfunction: The Trigger Point Manual*<sup>6</sup>. Dorsher et al<sup>4</sup>, determined that of the 255 trigger points, listed by Travell and Simons, 234 (92%) had anatomic correspondence with classical, miscellaneous, or new Acupuncture points listed in Deadman et al<sup>7</sup>.

Other authorities describe dry needling as Acupuncture. Mark Seem discussed dry needling in *A New American Acupuncture* in 1993<sup>8</sup>. Matt Callison describes dry needling in his *Motor Points Index*<sup>9</sup> as does Whitfield Reaves in *The Acupuncture Handbook of Sports Injuries and Pain: A Four Step Approach to Treatment*<sup>10</sup>. Yun-tao Ma, author of *Biomedical Acupuncture for Sports and Trauma Rehabilitation Dry Needling Techniques*, describes dry needling as Acupuncture and provides a rich historical explanation<sup>11</sup>. Chan Gunn sought to create language more readily accepted in the West in a 1980 article<sup>12</sup>. These examples make it clear that there is a literary tradition in the Field of Acupuncture that uses the term “dry needling” as a synonym for a specific, previously established Acupuncture technique.

The AAAOM has the following additional specific concerns: 1) No standards of education have been validly determined to assure that Physical Therapists (PT) using TDN are providing the public with a safe and effective product; 2) There is a clear effort to redefine identical medical procedures and thereby circumvent or obscure



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established rules and regulations regarding practice; and 3) In many states, addition of TDN to PT practice is a scope expansion that should require legislative process, not a determination by a PT Board.

The U.S. Department of Education recognizes ACAOM as the sole accrediting agency for Acupuncture training institutions as well as their Master's and Doctoral Degree programs.<sup>13 14</sup> Training in Acupuncture, which has been rigorously refined over the course of hundreds of years internationally and forty years domestically, is well established and designed to support safe and effective practice.<sup>15 16</sup> Attempts to circumvent Acupuncture training standards, licensing or regulatory laws by administratively retitling acupuncture as "dry needling" or any other name is confusing to the public, misleading and creates a significant endangerment to public welfare.

The actual risk has already been investigated by at least one malpractice insurance company that has stated it will cancel policies for Physical Therapists "engaging in a medical procedure for which they have no adequate education or training."<sup>17</sup> Recent actions by state medical regulatory authorities have identified and acted upon the aforementioned risk.<sup>3</sup>

In conclusion, the AAAOM strongly urges legislators, regulators, advisory boards, advocates of public safety, and medical professional associations to carefully consider the impact of these actions.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15108608>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.Acupuncture.org.au/zone\\_files/Download\\_Icons/jing-luo\\_march\\_2011\\_web.pdf](http://www.Acupuncture.org.au/zone_files/Download_Icons/jing-luo_march_2011_web.pdf) pg. 10

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.aaaom.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/DryNeedling.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Dorsher PT. *Trigger Points And Acupuncture Points: Anatomic And Clinical Correlations*. Medical Acupuncture. 2006;17(3).

<sup>5</sup> Deadman P, Al-Khafaji M, Baker K. *A Manual of Acupuncture*. Kingham, Oxfordshire Journal of Chinese Medicine Publications; 1998.

<sup>6</sup> Travell J, Simons D. *Myofascial Pain Dysfunction: The Trigger Point Manual*. Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins; 1983.

<sup>7</sup> Deadman P, Al-Khafaji M, Baker K. *A Manual of Acupuncture*. Kingham, Oxfordshire Journal of Chinese Medicine Publications

<sup>8</sup> Seem M. *A New American Acupuncture: Acupuncture Osteopathy, the Myofascial Release of the Bodymind*. Boulder, CO: Blue Poppy Press; 1993.

<sup>9</sup> Callison M. *Motor Point Index: An Acupuncturist's Guide to Locating and Treating Motor Points* San Diego, CA: AcuSport Seminar Series LLC; 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Reaves W, Bong C. *The Acupuncture Handbook of Sports Injuries & Pain*. Boulder, CO: Hidden Needle Press; 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Ma, Yun-tao. *Biomedical Acupuncture for Sports and Trauma Rehabilitation Dry Needling Techniques*. New York: Elsevier; 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Gunn CC, Milbrandt WE, Little AS, Mason KE. *Dry Needling of Muscle Motor Points for Chronic Low-Back Pain: A Randomized Clinical Trial With Long-Term Follow-Up*. Spine. 1980;5(3):279-91.

<sup>13</sup> <http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.aaaom.org/about/>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.aaaom.org/documents/accreditation-manual.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.nccaom.org/applicants/eligibility-requirements>

<sup>17</sup> Letter from Allied Professional Services [on file at AAAOM]