

# Use of Acupuncture and Related Therapies within Occupational Therapy Practice

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## Position

The Alberta College of Occupational Therapy supports the use of acupuncture by qualified occupational therapists and believes that acupuncture and related therapies may be useful, as an adjunct or alternative treatment or included in a comprehensive management program (NIH, 1997), to enhance occupational performance outcomes or facilitate treatment goals. Acupuncture may be implemented in the practice of occupational therapy to facilitate or maintain occupational performance in the areas of self-care, productivity and leisure, for example to reduce a client's pain prior to engagement in meaningful activity.

## Background

Occupational therapy is a unique combination of medical and behavioral sciences which is primarily concerned with the functional independence of individuals. Occupational therapy is based on a conceptual model that includes the integration of physical, mental, socio-cultural and spiritual aspects of the self, which when balanced allow the individual to experience a sense of well being (CAOT, 1991). As the roles for occupational therapy expand to include additional evidence-based therapeutic approaches, we retain these fundamental values. Various modalities are used by occupational therapists to promote function.

Acupuncture involves insertion of acupuncture needles and/or application of heat, electricity, vibration, cupping, laser, or finger pressure to specific points on the body. This normalizes the flow of energy and stimulates the body's natural ability to heal, helps reduce inflammation, swelling and pain, improves function in certain areas of the body and promotes physical and emotional well being. Acupuncture diagnosis and treatment is based on the philosophy of classical Chinese principles, which involves facilitating the movement of qi (a substance of energy which flows through the body), or on more modern principles involving the stimulation of a neurophysiological response in the body (endogenous opioids)(Brooks, 2001; Ernst & White, 1999).

A meta-analysis of the potential usefulness of acupuncture as a complementary modality has shown promising results (NIH, 1997). The World Health Organization recognizes acupuncture as being effective in the treatment of acute and chronic problems related to disorders of the musculoskeletal, neurological, respiratory, and circulatory systems, as well as for emotional and psychological problems (WHO, 2003). The evidence in support of acupuncture is as strong as that for many accepted Western medical therapies (NIH, 1997).

Acupuncture is a safe procedure when performed by trained individuals in a clinical environment using sterile, disposable needles (Belgrade, et al., 2000). The incidence of adverse effects from acupuncture is substantially lower than that of many drugs or other accepted medical procedures used for the same conditions (NIH, 1997).

### Competency Requirements

ACOT, as the regulatory body for occupational therapists in the province of Alberta, recognizes that the practice of acupuncture is safe and effective when done properly by a competent occupational therapist with training in acupuncture. Occupational therapists may perform acupuncture if they have successfully completed all of the required course work and examinations of either the Acupuncture Foundation of Canada Institute (AFCI) courses or the Certificate Program of Medical Acupuncture (CPMA) program. Training from other sources will be evaluated on an individual basis by ACOT.

ACOT maintains a roster of occupational therapists qualified to use acupuncture. Only occupational therapists registered on the ACOT Acupuncture Roster may incorporate acupuncture into their practice.

Occupational therapists who perform acupuncture in their practice shall maintain competency in acupuncture through continuing education, ongoing experience, and/or self-development as documented in the therapist's continuing competency program.

### Responsibilities of the Occupational Therapist

The occupational therapist who performs acupuncture shall explain the benefits and risks of acupuncture to the client, as well as alternative treatments. The therapist shall obtain informed consent. Therapists shall adhere to universal precautions and standardized infection control practices. Individuals receiving acupuncture must be able to access the occupational therapist throughout the treatment. Monitoring and documentation of treatment response, progress and any adverse reactions are required. Additionally, documentation of assessment including any acupuncture diagnostic findings, treatment processes and responses, including any adverse reactions to treatment, are required.

Occupational therapists incorporating acupuncture within their practice shall not use the protected title "Acupuncturist" unless they have met the requirements and are registered under the *Health Disciplines Act* or the *Health Professions Act* as a "Registered Acupuncturist".

## References

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