

Are All Acupuncture Providers Created Equal?

By Toni Eatros, MS, Dipl Ac, AP

Many of you have been thinking about trying acupuncture for that nagging back or neck pain. You have done the research, and now you are ready to schedule an appointment. You google acupuncture and a variety of different type of providers come up in the search results. Acupuncture, in Florida, is currently being provided by a variety of different health care practitioners, including Acupuncture Physicians, Chiropractors, Medical Doctors, and Doctor's of Osteopathy. Physical therapists are currently pushing hard to incorporate "dry needling" into their scope of practice as well. So who do you choose? This article will assist you in sorting out the different acupuncture credentials so you can make the most informed health care decision.

Most states in the US require the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM) exam or NCCAOM certification as a prerequisite for a license to practice acupuncture. The Florida Board of Acupuncture (<http://www.doh.state.fl.us/mqa/acupunct/>) also requires this, but only for Acupuncture Physician's (AP), not providers with certificates to practice acupuncture. So, although Florida has stringent standards for licensure, it also has enormous discrepancy in the training required among the different providers.

In Florida, licensed acupuncturists are given the title Acupuncture Physician, or AP. An Acupuncture Physician has met the following requirements to be able to practice in Florida:

- 60 undergraduate college credits from an accredited postsecondary school prior to enrolling in an approved course of study in acupuncture and oriental medicine
- Successful completion of an Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine candidate or accredited four-year master's level program
- Completion of an approved training program that includes supervised clinical experience
- The successful passage of the NCCAOM exam
- Completion of a National Certification Process
- Two hours of prevention of medical errors continuing education and before the first license renewal, three hours of HIV/AIDS continuing education.



An Acupuncture Physician is also required to take 30 credit hours of continuing education every two years to maintain an active license to practice. The requirements for continuing education are a two credit course in the prevention of medical errors, two credits of Florida laws and rules, five credits of biomedical sciences, and 21 credits of general continuing education every two years.

Now, let's compare the above requirements to some of the other health care providers that now offer acupuncture services. Chiropractors can receive acupuncture certification after completing a mere 100 hour course in acupuncture and successfully passing the National Board of Chiropractic Examiners (NBCE) Acupuncture Examination. The American Board of Medical Acupuncture requires medical doctors to complete 300 hours of acupuncture course work, but the state of Florida has no clear cut requirements. This means that in the state of Florida, medical doctors and osteopaths can offer acupuncture services without any specific additional acupuncture training.

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Why does this matter? The differences in acupuncture training is vital to the results that patients receive from treatment. Without a fundamental understanding of the traditional Chinese medicine diagnostic criteria, pulse and tongue diagnostic skills, oriental medicine philosophy, needle placement, safety, and other related knowledge, a medical doctor cannot offer the same benefits and successful outcomes as a Florida Acupuncture Physician that has almost 3,000 hours of education.

Many insurance companies are starting to offer benefits for acupuncture treatment with the stipulation that a medical doctor or osteopathic physician provides the service. This is unfortunate, as the "cook book" style acupuncture offered by these other providers often have hit or miss results. When a patient receives subpar treatment it reduces the likelihood that they will continue to seek out acupuncture treatment and take advantage of its proven benefits. Soon, the insurance companies will deem that acupuncture is not a viable treatment option due to poor treatment outcomes and will stop providing coverage.

You wouldn't go to a podiatrist for gall bladder surgery, nor should you go to an undertrained practitioner for acupuncture treatment. Going to an undertrained acupuncture provider benefits no one and undermines the value of an acupuncture license. Florida continues to increase acupuncture licensure requirements, so why doesn't this hold true for those providers with only a certification? Acupuncture is acupuncture and the requirements for anyone providing it should be equal.

If you are thinking about giving acupuncture a try, seek out the best acupuncture treatment available performed by a rigorously trained Acupuncture Physician. Go to the acupuncture national association website, <http://www.nccaom.org/fap>, to search for highly trained Acupuncture Physicians in your area. Acupuncture and Natural Health Solutions provides excellent, highly qualified acupuncture treatment. Call 239-260-4566 or go online, www.AcupunctureSolutionsOnline.com, for more information or to schedule an appointment today.