College of Physiotherapists of Manitoba

PRACTICE DIRECTION

Current and updated as of: May 7, 2026

Use of Needles in Practice

Purpose:

This Practice Direction provides direction to physiotherapists for the safe, competent, and ethical practice regarding the use of needles in physiotherapy practice.

Definitions:

The terms "acupuncture", "dry needling therapy", and "use of dry needles" can describe a variety of treatment techniques that use solid filament (acupuncture) needles to puncture the skin for therapeutic purposes. These techniques include a range of approaches, such as acupuncture, trigger point dry needling, intramuscular stimulation or similar treatments used by numerous health care professions.

Acupuncture refers to a therapeutic technique involving the insertion of solid, thin needles into specific body points to alleviate pain, reduce inflammation, and enhance functional recovery.

Dry needling therapy refers to a treatment technique used to treat myofascial pain and dysfunction by inserting thin, solid filament needles into specific muscle trigger points.

Practice:

Physiotherapists will:

- Discuss all possible options for treatment with the patient[1].
- Disclose any additional fees associated with any treatment modalities prior to the application of the treatment.
- Acknowledge that patients may decline the use of needles as part of their treatment plan.
- Not attempt to persuade, coerce, or intimidate patients into accepting a particular treatment or course of treatment.

[1] The term patient can be interchanged with the term client. "Clients are recipients of physiotherapy services, and may be individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, or populations. An individual client may also be referred to as a patient. In some circumstances clients/patients may be represented by their substitute decision-makers."

The Physiotherapist must:

- Establish through assessment and documentation that the patient may be an appropriate candidate for needling.
- Ensure and document that patients have the information and skills needed to be active participants in their own care during and/or after the technique, including an understanding of the proper management of side effects or adverse events.
- Obtain written informed consent for the initial treatment and each treatment that involves new techniques or new anatomical areas of therapy.
- Ensure no part of acupuncture or dry needling treatment is delegated with the exception of to a physiotherapist who has been granted the appropriate notation from the College. This includes both the insertion and removal of the needles. The physiotherapist needs to be able to account for all the needles inserted/used as well as assessing the patient's treatment response. A physiotherapist trained in needling must be available to the patient receiving needle therapy throughout the treatment.
- Have a written plan in place and be prepared to manage any harmful incidents or adverse events during treatment. Refer to the *Patient Safety Incident Resource* for more information on writing safety incident plans and the components to include.
- Disclose potential side effects and adverse events to the patient including those that may occur during and/or after the treatment and describe the proper management of these side effects or adverse events. Physiotherapists must provide enough information so that the patient or their caregivers are prepared and able to respond if issues arise after/outside the treatment setting.

Acupuncture Educational Requirements:

Physiotherapists performing acupuncture must have successfully completed a program that meets the following criteria:

Curriculum:

- Minimum of 100 hours of instructor interaction and evaluation which should include theoretical and practical components;

- Course content must include, but is not limited to:

    - theoretical and practical basis of acupuncture;
    - indications/contraindications/precautions;
    - application of acupuncture as an aspect of physiotherapy practice;
    - detailed human anatomy including potential anomalies which could compromise safe needle insertion and removal. Specifically, there must be instruction in regional anatomy including potential anatomical anomalies in the neck and thorax;

- discussion on consent and patient information on side effects and adverse reactions;
- explicit instruction must be provided as part of the course work in the recognition, assessment, and management of all potential side effects and adverse events, including equipment required in the clinical setting. These strategies must include planning and preparing for the physiotherapist to manage adverse reactions, advice for patients if adverse events occur away from the clinic, requisite on-site equipment and potential need for transportation of patient to an emergency medical facility;
- hand-on practice of point location and relevant anatomy needling technique;
- patient safety and infection control;
- objective evaluation of the physiotherapist's competency with the points demonstrated and used during the course included in the program. There must be both a written and a practical evaluation as part of the program.

Principal Instructor:

The principal instructor must meet the following requirements:

- Have their name on or be eligible to be on the CPM Acupuncture Roster;
- Have a minimum of five (5) years of acupuncture experience following certification;
- Have demonstrated ongoing continuing education and professional development in the field; and
- Have previous experience participating in an acupuncture course, e.g., as a lab demonstrator or teaching assistant.

Examination:

- A formal written and practical examination must be successfully completed to determine level of competency;
- An external examiner (not involved in teaching the course) must be involved in the examination process, either alone or in conjunction with other instructors/examiners. The external examiner must meet the same qualification requirements as outlined for the principal instructor.

Dry Needling Educational Requirements:

Physiotherapists performing dry needling must have successfully completed a program that meets the following criteria:

Curriculum:

- Minimum of 75 hours of instructor interaction and evaluation with a minimum of 30% of those hours being direct contact hours. The education hours must include theoretical and practical components.

- Course content must include, but is not limited to:
    - evidence-based theoretical and practical basis of dry needling including understanding the mechanical, chemical and neurophysiological effects of dry needling;
    - indications/contraindications/precautions based on best practice;
    - applying clinical reasoning in the application of dry needling as an aspect of physiotherapy practice including assessment skills for application of dry needling;
    - detailed human anatomy including potential anomalies which could compromise safe needle insertion and removal. Specifically, there must be instruction in regional anatomy including potential anatomical anomalies in the neck and thorax;
    - discussion on informed consent and patient information on side effects and adverse reactions;
    - explicit instruction must be provided as part of the course work in the recognition, assessment, and management of all patient safety incidents and adverse events, including equipment required in the clinical setting. These strategies must include planning and preparing for the physiotherapist to manage patient safety incidents, guidance for patients on how to manage harms away from the clinic, requisite on-site equipment and potential need for transportation of patient to an emergency medical facility;
    - hand-on practice of point location and relevant anatomy needling technique;
    - patient safety and infection control;

Principal Instructor:

The principal instructor must meet the following requirements:

- Have their name on or be eligible to be on the CPM Dry Needling Roster if the instructor is a physiotherapist or have proof of registration as a regulated health care professional if not;
- Have a minimum of five (5) years of dry needling experience following certification;
- Have demonstrated ongoing continuing education and professional development in the field; and
- Have previous experience participating in a dry needling course, e.g., as a lab demonstrator or teaching assistant.

Examination:

- A formal written and practical examination must be successfully completed to determine level of competency. Details on the format of the testing must be provided;
- The evaluation must allow for objective assessment of the attendee's theoretical knowledge of the course content and practical dry needling skills.

Competency:

Only physiotherapists who have met the CPM requirements to practice acupuncture and/or dry needling therapy and have been approved and had their name entered on the applicable roster(s) may do so.
Physiotherapists must:

- Maintain ongoing competence. The Continuing Competency Program will require members to demonstrate evidence of ongoing competency in acupuncture and/or dry needling.
- Show all documentation related to adverse event(s) action plans when requested during participation in the Continuing Competency Program.

Registration with CPM:

Acupuncture and Dry Needling are separate rostered activities in Manitoba.

All physiotherapists who wish to perform acupuncture **and/or** dry needling as part of their physiotherapy practice in Manitoba must:

- be registered with the CPM on the Full Active register;
- submit evidence to the College via the online application form and submission of a course certificate(s) of having met the educational criteria outlined in this Practice Direction for the roster(s) they are applying for.
- Sign a declaration that they have read and will abide by the Practice Directions:
    - Assessment, Diagnosis and Treatment,
    - Infection Control,
    - Risk Management and Safety including the Patient Safety Incident Resource,
    - Informed Consent,
    - Documentation and,
    - Use of Needles in Practice
- only start practicing Acupuncture or Dry Needling in Manitoba once their name has been placed on the appropriate roster(s) and have received written confirmation from the College.
- not delegate any aspect of these needling techniques to anyone who has not been approved and had their name entered on the dry needling or acupuncture roster(s).
- maintain their competency and participate in the Continuing competency Program as required.

It is the member's responsibility to provide all documentation to the College, as well as to maintain their professional competency, credentials and current registration.

Related Standards:
Risk Management and Safety
Patient Safety Incident Resource
Informed Consent
Assessment, Diagnosis and Treatment
Infection Control
Documentation