Integrating Acupuncture Into a Chiropractic Practice

By James S. Copeland, DC, FIAMA

In these times of diminishing insurance payments and fewer patient visits, acupuncture can be both a lucrative adjunct to a practice, and a beneficial therapy for the patients.

Why Bring Acupuncture Into Your Practice?

The simple answer is that it can bring added revenue into your practice, and can help speed up recovery in your patients. The added positive to this is that it is not difficult to incorporate into your practice. Unless the doctor has absolutely no interest in improving these aspects of a practice, this is a no-brainer.

What Specifically Are The Benefits to Patients?

Acupuncture, when done in addition to chiropractic care, will help you resolve cases that might otherwise have failed to respond in the past. It is relatively safe to perform, and once patients have received treatment, they are usually quite enthusiastic about coming in. Pain relief and faster healing time are the two most notable benefits to the patient.

What Are Other Benefits to The Practice?

Along with added income and improved patient treatment outcomes, there is also the advantage of "another product or service" offered by your office. Patients looking for acupuncture will be more likely to choose a chiropractor who offers this service over a "lay acupuncturist," because the public is more familiar and more comfortable going to a chiropractor. Would you rather go to a person in a familiar profession like chiropractic or a non-doctor practitioner who does not have the training in diagnosis, x-ray, etc. that you have? Many patients would rather go to a practitioner who has many skills than one who provides only one service. In short, you will have a more marketable practice with the addition of acupuncture.

What Are the Training Requirements?
In some states, the hours of training required to practice acupuncture is still 100 classroom hours. Many states are now beginning to require 200 hours, and there are plans to eventually require 300 hours. Many states differ on the amount of training required, and doctors interested in practicing acupuncture should contact their State Chiropractic Boards to find out if it is allowed in their state. There is now a National Board Exam that is required in order to become certified by state boards. This is provided by the National Board of Chiropractic Examiners to insure that those who wish to practice acupuncture, meet equal standards across the country.

Many of our chiropractic colleges offer post-graduate programs in acupuncture, and there are several independent groups outside of the college that offer accredited programs as well. The doctor need do no more than call the post grad division of a college offering this post grad program. Most of these programs will also be listed on the college websites.

**Diplomate in Chiropractic Acupuncture**

The American Chiropractic Association now offers a Diplomate in Chiropractic Acupuncture. Dr’s Richard Yennie and John Amaro, both senior instructors of acupuncture in the chiropractic profession. Dr. Zev Myerowitz, one of the founders of the International Academy of Chiropractic Acupuncture, also offers a 300 hr. program in New England which leads to Diplomate status. John Sunderlage, who teaches acupuncture through the National University of Health Sciences in Chicago, offers beginning and advanced acupuncture for chiropractors as well. It is through these doctors and others, that acupuncture has advanced in our profession.

**How Long Does it Take to Become Certified to Practice Acupuncture?**

For many 100 hour courses, a doctor can complete the program in anywhere from 4 to 8 sessions, depending on the length. For the 200 hour programs, you would double those figures.

Dr. Yennie offers weekend programs that complete 25 hours per weekend. Others are taking the iniative and following his example with shorter total time spent. To find out when and where the National Board Exams are given, the candidate should contact the National Board of Chiropractic Examiners.

**Needle or Non-Needle Acupuncture?**
In chiropractic, we find doctors practicing acupuncture a number of ways. Some use traditional needles, while others use microcurrent, cold laser, acupressure, tenshin, etc. Regardless of the systems used, acupuncture is now well established in our profession and hopefully, is here to stay.

**What Equipment Will DC’s Need to Invest in to Practice Acupuncture?**

The primary investment will be minimal. You can do as little as purchase some needles and alcohol swabs and a sharps disposal container. Other items such as microcurrent stimulators with leads and alligator clips can be helpful and are relatively inexpensive.

There are hundreds of distributors of acupuncture supplies all over the country, so shopping will be easy if you have internet access.

**Benefits of Acupuncture**

The World Health Organization (SHO) has determined (through controlled trials) that acupuncture is an effective treatment for over 40 diseases, symptoms or conditions. Another 70 conditions are currently being studied, with all showing some therapeutic improvements to date. Some of the conditions that respond to acupuncture include:

- **Lungs**: Some bronchial asthmas, coughs & colds (acute and chronic).
- **Ears, Nose, & Throat**: Toothaches, pain from tooth extraction, earaches, sinus infection & inflammation, allergic rhinitis.
- **Vision Problems**: Central retina and conjunctiva inflammation, near sightedness (in children), and some cataracts.
- **Stomach & Intestines**: Digestive tract problems, hiccups, inflammation of the stomach, duodenal ulcers, inflammation of the colon, constipation, diarrhea, dysentery caused by certain bacteria, ulcerative colitis, crohn’s disease.
- **Pain**: Tennis elbow, frozen shoulder, lower back pain, osteoarthritis, knee pain, migraines, sciatica, facial pain, neck pain, carpal tunnel syndrome, whiplash, and many others.
- **Gynecological & Sexual Problems**: Painful periods, PMS, absent or irregular periods, infertility, male sexual dysfunction (non-organic).
- **Pregnancy Issues**: Malposition of fetus (Breech-baby), prolonged or delayed labor, morning sickness, problems with lactation.
• **Nausea:** Infection, chemotherapy or pregnancy related.

• **Emotional:** Depression, anxiety, insomnia, stress.

• **Others:** Fever, sore throats, acne, Bell’s Palsey, fibromyalgia, etc.

Every practicing doctor can give his/her own list of conditions that respond to acupuncture, and many of those conditions will not be on the list I have presented. This is a good thing because it shows that there are many conditions that even though not yet listed on those by WHO, still have great value in treating our patients.

Many chiropractors choose to limit their acupuncture to musculoskeletal and neurological problems when adding acupuncture to their protocols, but many times it is necessary to treat other issues in addition to musculoskeletal conditions simply because they are caused by those problems. Example: Viscero-somatic reflexes. So, in order to treat many patients, we must treat the whole person in order to improve the patient’s musculoskeletal problems.

The bottom line is that if modern chiropractors wish to expand their scope of practice, attract new patients, get better than average results..... and earn more income, they do not have to add pharmaceuticals and medical procedures to their practices to accomplish this. They need only to study this wonderful and beneficial procedure and add it to their practices.

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