



COLLEGE OF
PHYSICAL
THERAPISTS
OF ALBERTA

position statement

USE OF NEEDLES

Physical therapists¹ whose practice includes the use of needles have successfully completed either the Acupuncture Foundation of Canada Institute Examinations, University of Alberta's Faculty of Extension Certificate Program in Medical Acupuncture course and examinations or Dr. C. Gunn's Intramuscular Stimulation (IMS) course and examinations and have maintained competence in the use of needles.

The College of Physical Therapists of Alberta maintains two rosters of physical therapists qualified to use needles in practice: the Needling Roster-Acupuncture and the Needling Roster-IMS; these rosters are available upon request. Physical therapists incorporate the use of needles into physical therapy treatments only if their name appears on a needling roster. Physical therapists studying acupuncture² or intramuscular stimulation³ are registered on a 'provisional' roster prior to successful and timely completion of the certificate exams.

Physical therapists who incorporate acupuncture techniques into practice do not use the title Acupuncturist⁴ unless they are also registered under the *Health Disciplines Act* as a Registered Acupuncturist. Physical therapists who are registered under the *Health Disciplines Act* as Registered Acupuncturists must ensure patients understand which profession is being practiced.

- Physical therapists ensure only sterile single-use needles are used.
- The College recommends that the physical therapist who inserts the needles is the physical therapist who removes the needles.
- Physical therapists ensure the needle shaft is maintained in a sterile state throughout the treatment. If the needle shaft is contaminated by the physical therapist's hand, by another non-sterile object or surface, the needle must not be used.
- Needle manipulation must be performed without the physical therapist's hands coming into contact with the shaft of the needle.
- When withdrawing the needle, bare fingers must not be used to press down at the insertion site. A Q-tip or cotton ball should be used for the protection of both the physical therapist and the patient.
- To prevent needle stick injuries, needles are not to be recapped, purposely bent or broken, removed from disposable syringes or otherwise manipulated by hand.
- Sterile guide tubes, like needles, are for single-patient use only and must be disposed of immediately after treatment.
- Where a reusable plunger type applicator is used in intramuscular stimulation, the applicator must be cleaned⁵ first and then properly sterilized⁶ after use with each patient.
- Used syringes and needles, scalpel blades and other sharp items are placed in a puncture-resistant container with a lid and disposed of by a company that handles waste for medical sources.

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¹ Physical therapist, physiotherapist, physical therapy, physiotherapy, physiotherapie, physiotherapeute, PT and pht are official marks used with permission. The terms physical therapist and physical therapy are synonyms for physiotherapist and physiotherapy respectively.

² Acupuncture: inserting sterile acupuncture needles at one or more acupuncture points selected to achieve a therapeutic effect, based on Traditional Chinese Medicine and/or neurophysiological principles.

³ Intramuscular Stimulation: inserting sterile needles to stimulate contracted muscle tissue to achieve a therapeutic effect based on neurophysiological principles.

⁴ Some physical therapists have met the requirements for registration as an Acupuncturist in Alberta and these physical therapists are entitled to use the title Acupuncturist or Registered Acupuncturist.

⁵ Cleaning and disinfecting is widely accepted as a two-step procedure. Clean with detergent then rinse with clear warm water prior to disinfection or sterilization.

⁶ Methods of sterilization include: autoclave, dry heat sterilizer (all the instruments for the autoclave or dry sterilizer must be prepackaged), or chemical sterilant (7% Accelerated Hydrogen Peroxide). The use of chemical sterilant is not practical unless it is used under strict laboratory or hospital technique control.