

Why increased access to acupuncture is important –



Acupuncture is cost-effective, clinically effective, and widely used in a variety of health care settings

It is time for acupuncture services to take their proper place in the broader system of health care delivery and to be compensated as such.

- Under Massachusetts’ mandated universal health care and insurance system **very few insurers cover acupuncture services.**
- **These bills makes acupuncture services more accessible** to all families in every income bracket in the Commonwealth.
- **These bills** requires that **all individual or group accident or health insurance policies**, issued by an insurer or non-profit health service corporation, **provide benefits for services rendered by a licensed acupuncturist** in the state of

Massachusetts for diagnoses of pain management, substance abuse treatment and nausea.

- **These bills** would also establish a **commission on acupuncture and wellness** to determine the best and most cost effective way for acupuncture to complement other health care services in a post-Health Care reform environment.
- **The consumer should have a full range of choices** among all professionals licensed to practice acupuncture.

The CDC reports that “Deaths from prescription painkillers have reached epidemic levels in the past decade” and recommends Health Insurers “increase coverage for other treatments to reduce pain”

www.cdc.gov/VitalSigns/PainkillerOverdoses/index.html

I. Cost-effectiveness of Acupuncture:

- **Acupuncture has been rated at the highest level of effectiveness in the treatment of low back pain in two large studies (Cochrane and the British Government), and as a result of these studies the British and German health care systems now pay for acupuncture.**

Illness	Savings per Patient with acupuncture treatment
Post Stroke Rehabilitation Johansson, K. et al (1994) <i>Neurology</i> 43:2189-2192	\$26,000
Migraine “Reduction in Work Days Missed Due to Migraine” – Liguori, A. et al (2000)	\$35,480
Angina Pectoris Reduction of hospitalization by 90% and a 70% reduction in surgery. – Alterm, J. <i>Complement Med</i> 5:405-413	\$32,000
Severe Osteoarthritis Compared to arthroplasty surgery, “Acupuncture in the Treatment of Severe Osteoarthritis: a long term study”	\$9,000
Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS) Laser acupuncture treatments vs. medically treated without surgery	\$4,246

- According to a study in Washington State, costs actually decreased for acupuncture and complementary medicine users in high disease burden groups due to a reduction of more expensive conventional care.
- In these studies, inclusion of acupuncture did not significantly escalate health care costs, perhaps decreasing costs if preventive care, whose results are hard to factor in, were included.

II. Clinical Efficacy:

- Acupuncture is a clinically effective treatment supported by numerous studies.
- NIH reports that the data in support of acupuncture are as strong as those for many accepted Western medical therapies.
- In 1997 the NIH approved acupuncture as an adjunctive treatment for several conditions including pain, nausea, asthma, carpal tunnel syndrome and paralysis from stroke.
- Over 500 positive clinical trials measuring the efficacy of acupuncture have been conducted in the past three decades.
- There are 50 systematic reviews of acupuncture in the Cochrane databases. Overall, the trend has been favorable, advocating the use of acupuncture in a

clinical setting as an adjunct treatment with conventional therapies, where suitable (Witt et al. 2006).

- Positive studies include acupuncture treatment for low back pain, neck pain, osteoarthritis of the knee and hip, fibromyalgia, rheumatoid arthritis, TMJ, headaches, infertility, pain and nausea in cancer patients.

III. Acupuncture Training:

- Acupuncturists licensed in Massachusetts are regulated by the Board of Medicine. Acupuncturists **train for a minimum of 2050 hours** in acupuncture in addition to required science and western biomedical courses. This is the equivalent of 3 to 4 years of study to achieve an entry level degree of Master of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine.

IV. Acupuncture treatments are safe and result in very few side effects:

- One of the advantages of acupuncture is that the incidence of adverse effects is substantially lower than that of many drugs or other accepted medical procedures used for the same conditions.
- Acupuncture is a safe and cost-effective form of medicine that has been practiced and refined for more than 2500 years. Acupuncture uses ultra-thin needles to balance and increase energy and stimulate the nervous system to release brain chemicals for relaxation and well being.
- Studies in Europe and Japan showed that less than 0.2% of all individuals treated with acupuncture experienced adverse effects.
- As of 2008, the Committee on Acupuncture shows 1026 acupuncturists licensed in Massachusetts.
- From 2004-2008 the total number of complaints lodged against acupuncturists in Massachusetts numbered 14, with two of those leading to disciplinary action and two to denial of license. This reflects the general safety of the practice of acupuncture; this is true nationwide as well.

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