



MEDIA RELEASE ACUPUNCTURE – A SAFE CHOICE IN AUSTRALIA

AACMA RESPONSE TO ARTICLE IN ‘SYDNEY MORNING HERALD’

Acupuncture Spreads Disease (19 March 2010)

<http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/wellbeing/acupuncture-spreads-disease-20100319-qjgo.html>

In your article “Acupuncture Spreads Disease” you refer to comments made by Patrick Woo of the University of Hong Kong “To prevent infections transmitted by acupuncture, infection control measures should be implemented, such as use of disposable needles, skin disinfection procedures and aseptic techniques, stricter regulation and accreditation requirements are also needed”.

The Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association Ltd (AACMA) agrees that adherence to proper infection control guidelines is necessary.

However, the misleading impression given to the reader is that these are current problems being experienced in Australia and that there is no government regulation or infection control standards already in place addressing the issues raised in the report.

The infection control standards that are called for in the article are already in place in Australia and have been in place for decades.

The facts – high standards for infection control

Australia has very high standards for infection control applicable to health settings, including acupuncture practices. State governments already regulate practices involving the penetration of the skin via public health legislation and Skin Penetration Guidelines/Regulations.

CEO of the Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association Ltd, Judy James says ‘AACMA has consistently set the national benchmarks for acupuncture and Chinese medicine education and practice in Australia for over 30 years. Our members are expected to abide by high standards of infection control in their professional practice. It has been accepted practice for decades in Australia to only use pre-sterilised single-use acupuncture needles’.

Pre-sterilised acupuncture needles are considered Class IIA medical devices and must demonstrate Good Manufacturing Practice to the satisfaction of the Australian government Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) before being sold or supplied in Australia as sterile devices.

Qualified acupuncture professionals in Australia comply with contemporary standards of infection control. Members of the Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association Ltd (AACMA) are required to abide by Infection Control Guidelines which require, amongst other standards:

- hand-washing before and after each procedure;
- the skin to be swabbed prior to needle insertion (such as with an individually packaged isopropyl skin preparation swab) to reduce the bacterial load on the skin;
- the acupuncture needles are required to be sterile (such as individually pre-packaged pre-sterilised single use needles);
- other equipment to be sterilised or disinfected according to Australian standards for infection control;
- hygienic (aseptic) processes of insertion and removal of the needle to avoid contamination and cross infection;
- safe disposal of used needles according to Australian Standards (such as disposal in a yellow sharps container).

These processes minimise the risks associated with acupuncture and other practices involving skin penetration.

The AACMA *Infection Control Guidelines for Acupuncture* are currently under review. This is a routine review following the publication of draft revised national infection control standards for the health sector.

Under the current regulatory system, not all practitioners are accredited with the Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association Ltd or to abide by our standards. The Chinese medicine profession will become a nationally registered profession from 1 July 2012. This will require acupuncturists to be registered with the future Chinese medicine board of Australia if they are to continue to practice in the profession.

According to James 'National registration cannot arrive too soon. AACMA represents over 80% of qualified practitioners of acupuncture nationally. However, we can only regulate those persons who are members of AACMA. Without national registration, AACMA is unable to prevent unqualified, unsafe or unethical practitioners of acupuncture from offering their services to the community. Registration can only be good for the public health. It will provide a mechanism to remove unsafe, unethical and incompetent persons from the profession'.

A balanced view

It would have been better if your paper had sourced comments from AACMA as to the Australian situation before publishing the article.

AACMA reassures the many people who are receiving effective acupuncture that acupuncture is safe and effective when provided by a qualified practitioner.

Members of the public can locate a qualified AACMA accredited acupuncturist by contacting the AACMA National Practitioner Referral Service (1300 725 334) or via the Find a Practitioner service at www.acupuncture.org.au.

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