



## The NCCAOM® Certification in Acupuncture

### About Acupuncture

- The practice of acupuncture in the United States incorporates medical traditions from China, Japan, Korea, and other countries.<sup>1</sup> Acupuncture is one of the essential elements of Oriental medicine and the oldest, most commonly used medical procedure in the world. Originating in China more than 3,000 years ago, the practice of Oriental medicine includes acupuncture, electro-acupuncture, cupping, manual therapies such as acupressure, moxibustion, exercises such as *tai chi* or *qi gong*, as well as Chinese herbal preparations and dietary therapy.<sup>1</sup>
- Acupuncture is the stimulation of specific points on the body, by insertion of very fine, sterile, stainless steel needles to elicit a predictable physiological response. This stimulus may also be administered to the points using mild electrical stimulation (with or without needles), pressure techniques with the hands (acupressure) or the application of heat by various methods.
- Acupuncturists assess a patient's syndrome or pattern of disharmony by using a set of diagnostic skills that involve four areas; questioning, palpation, visual inspection, and olfactory-auditory data collection. An acupuncturist determines the necessary treatment principle and strategy to prompt the patient back to functional harmony by discriminating the exact pattern of the body's physiological response to pathogenic factors.
- The acupuncturist's skill at determining the appropriate points to treat is based upon his/her ability to accurately distinguish the presenting pattern, knowledge of correct points to address that pattern and knowledge of the proper type of stimulus for each point. This possession of this knowledge and skills is the key distinction between a professional, certified acupuncturist and other health care providers who employ acupuncture only as a modality (stimulating points for their general effect without adjusting their choice of points to the specific patient's need).

### Use of Acupuncture

- The Institute of Medicine identified 79 systematic reviews of acupuncture placing acupuncture third in usage among all complementary and alternative (CAM) therapies.<sup>2</sup>
- Acupuncture has been shown to provide generalized oxygenation and increased blood flow to specific areas of treatment. It also aids production of cortisone and other anti-inflammatory secretions and can increase the internal production of endorphins, the body's natural painkillers. In addition, a 2010 study from the University of Rochester in New York found that acupuncture can help relieve pain by triggering a natural pain-killing chemical called adenosine.<sup>3</sup>
- A recent study of acupuncture — the most rigorous and detailed analysis of the treatment to date — found that it can ease migraines and arthritis and other forms of chronic pain. The researchers, who [published their results in Archives of Internal Medicine](#), found that acupuncture outperformed sham treatments and standard care when used by people suffering from osteoarthritis, migraines and chronic back, neck and shoulder pain.<sup>4</sup>



- A 2006 patient survey from the Alternative Medicine Integration Group based in Florida, found that 94% of study patients being treated by CAM therapies (including acupuncture) agreed that the program treatment helped reduce levels of pain.<sup>5</sup>
- The World Health Organization recognizes acupuncture and Oriental medicine as effective for over 43 common ailments including:<sup>6</sup>

<p><b>Respiratory Disorders</b> Sinusitis, Rhinitis Common cold Tonsillitis Sore throat Hay fever Bronchitis Bronchial Asthma</p>	<p><b>Disorders of the Eyes</b> Acute conjunctivitis Myopia in children Cataracts without complications Central retinitis</p>	<p><b>Mental- Emotional Disorders</b> Anxiety Depression Stress Insomnia Addictions Weight control</p>
<p><b>Musculo-skeletal Disorders</b> Frozen shoulder, tennis elbow Low back pain Osteoarthritis and joint pains Stiff neck Tendinitis Bursitis Sprains Injuries from auto accidents Chronic fatigue syndrome Fibromyalgia</p>	<p><b>Gastro-intestinal Disorders</b> Acute and chronic gastritis Hyperacidity Hiccoughs Acute uncomplicated duodenal ulcer Chronic duodenal ulcer (pain relief) Acute and chronic colitis Acute bacillary dysentery Constipation Diarrhea Paralytic ileus</p>	<p><b>Neurological Disorders</b> Headache and Migraine Dizziness Trigeminal neuralgia Facial palsy (within 3-6 months) Paresis following stroke Peripheral neuropathies Meniere's disease Neurogenic bladder dysfunction Nocturnal enuresis Intercostal neuralgia Sciatica</p>
<p><b>Disorders of the Mouth</b> Toothache Post extraction pain Gingivitis Acute and chronic pharyngitis</p>	<p><b>Ear Disorders</b> Ringing in ears Deafness Meniere's disease Earache</p>	<p><b>Reproductive System Disorders</b> Infertility Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) Irregular Menses Menstrual cramps Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) Menopausal symptoms Morning sickness Urinary incontinence Impotence</p>

### ***Is use of acupuncture growing?***

- The American Hospital Association's *Health Forum 2007 Complementary and Alternative Medicine Survey of Hospitals* found that 35% of the hospitals offering complementary medicine provide acupuncture as an outpatient service to the patients. Additionally, acupuncture is represented as one of the top six modalities in both outpatient and inpatient settings amongst those hospitals.<sup>7</sup>
- In the United States and abroad, the use of acupuncture and Oriental medicine is gaining



widespread acceptance. In the United States there is an estimated 33,000 certified or licensed acupuncturists.

- In the past two decades, acupuncture has grown in popularity in the United States. The *2007 National Health Interview Survey* conducted by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) stated that acupuncture is being widely practiced by thousands of practitioners for relief or prevention of pain and for various other health conditions.
- According to the *2007 National Health Interview Survey*, the largest and most comprehensive survey of CAM use by American adults to date, acupuncture use has increased between 2002 and 2007 among adults. In 2007, almost 4 out of 10 adults had used CAM therapy in the past 12 months. Acupuncture is one of the CAM therapies that have seen an increase in usage during this time period.<sup>2</sup>

## **Identifying a Qualified Acupuncturist**

### ***How do I find a qualified acupuncturist?***

Look for a **Diplomate of Acupuncture (NCCAOM)<sup>®</sup>** or **Diplomate of Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM)<sup>®</sup>** by going to the [NCCAOM<sup>®</sup> Find a Practitioner](http://www.nccaom.org) directory at [www.nccaom.org](http://www.nccaom.org). Oriental medicine includes the practice of acupuncture, Chinese herbology and Asian bodywork therapy.

The additional designation of **licensed acupuncturist (L.Ac.)** is awarded by a state regulatory board. The NCCAOM website provides a table with state regulatory requirements and contact information.

Currently, 47 states, plus the District of Columbia, require NCCAOM certification or the passing of the NCCAOM examinations as a requirement for licensure to practice acupuncture. Each state board has a unique set of requirements for licensure. State rules and regulations are subject to change; therefore, one should always confirm current requirements for licensure with the appropriate state board. More information on state requirements is available at [www.nccaom.org](http://www.nccaom.org).

### ***What training does an NCCAOM Diplomate of Acupuncture have?***

Comprehensive training in traditional differential diagnosis and proper treatment methods require that a Diplomate of Acupuncture (NCCAOM)<sup>®</sup> completes three to four academic years of education at the master's degree level in an acupuncture program accredited by the Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (ACAOM) or has completed an international education program which is substantially equivalent to ACAOM standards. ACAOM is the only accrediting body recognized by the United States Department of Education as the authority for quality education and training in acupuncture and Oriental medicine. In addition to graduation from an ACAOM accredited program, a Diplomate of Acupuncture (NCCAOM) must demonstrate professional competency by



passing NCCAOM certification examinations in Foundations of Oriental Medicine, Acupuncture, and Biomedicine as well as meet other NCCAOM certification requirements. The NCCAOM Diplomate training and competency verification is in sharp contrast to the acupuncture training of other healthcare professionals such as chiropractors or registered nurses or even medical doctors who typically receive 100-300 hours of abbreviated training. These other healthcare professionals provide acupuncture by treating a more limited number of points.<sup>8</sup> Certified (and licensed) acupuncturists are also trained in standard medical history gathering, safety, ethics, common pharmaceuticals and supplements, and recognition of when to refer patients to other health care professionals or consult with other medical practitioners.

### **NCCAOM and its Diplomates**

The National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM) is widely accepted as the most influential leader in the field of acupuncture and Oriental medicine. Over 33,000 NCCAOM certifications have been issued since 1982. The NCCAOM, established in 1982, is a non-profit organization whose mission is *to establish, assess, and promote recognized standards of competence and safety in acupuncture and Oriental medicine for the protection and benefit of the public.* NCCAOM Acupuncture, Oriental Medicine and Chinese herbology certification programs are accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) of the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE)<sup>9</sup>. For more information on the NCCAOM, please visit the website at [www.nccaom.org](http://www.nccaom.org).

The following NCCAOM certifications carry the above NCCA accreditation seal:



- Diplomate of Acupuncture (NCCAOM)<sup>®</sup>
- Diplomate of Chinese Herbology (NCCAOM)<sup>®</sup>
- Diplomate of Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM)<sup>®</sup>

### **Contact Information**

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## References

1. National Institute of Health, National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine; <http://nccam.nih.gov/health/acupuncture/>; accessed January 29, 2014.
2. Barnes PM, Bloom B, Nahin R. CDC National Health Statistics Report #12. Complementary and Alternative Medicine Use among Adults and Children: United States, 2007; December 10, 2008.
3. Nedergaard M, Goldman N, et al. *Nature Neuroscience*, Adenosine A1 receptors mediate local anti-nociceptive effects of acupuncture; May 30, 2010; University of Rochester, New York.
4. O'Connor, A. Acupuncture Provides True Pain Relief in Study. *New York Times*; September 11, 2012. [http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/09/11/acupuncture-provides-true-pain-relief-in-study/?\\_php=true&\\_type=blogs&ref=acupuncture&r=0](http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/09/11/acupuncture-provides-true-pain-relief-in-study/?_php=true&_type=blogs&ref=acupuncture&r=0); accessed January 29, 2014
5. Alternative Medicine Integration Group; <http://www.amibestmed.com/>; accessed January 29, 2014.
6. Traditional Medicine – Growing Needs and Potential, World Health Organization Policy Perspective on Medicines; #1 May 2002; World Health Organization, Geneva.
7. Health Forum 2007 Complementary and Alternative Medicine Survey of Hospitals Summary of Results: August 2008; Chicago, Illinois.
8. Know Your Acupuncturist, Council of Colleges of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine; <http://www.ccaom.org>; accessed January 29, 2014.
9. The Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE); <http://www.credentialingexcellence.org/p/cm/ld/fid=50> accessed January 29, 2014.