



Briefing Paper – Dry Needling by Physical Therapists SB 6374 / HB 2606

What is dry needling?

- Dry needling is a Western medicine technique that involves the insertion of a solid filament needle without medication through the skin into underlying tissue to treat neuromuscular conditions, pain, movement impairments and disability.
- Dry needling is not the practice of acupuncture. In East Asian medicine, acupuncture is used to stimulate acupuncture points and meridians.
- Dry needling was developed around 40 years ago and is based on modern scientific study of the neuromusculoskeletal system including anatomy, physiology, histology, biomechanics, neuroscience, kinesiology, pharmacology and pathology.
- Dry needling is a therapeutic intervention tool that is used in conjunction with other physical therapy interventions in order to improve patients' movement and function.
- Practiced by physiatrists in the United States for more than 20 years, physical therapists in the US began using dry needling as part of their manual therapy practice about 10 years ago.
- Physical therapist practice of dry needling is specifically allowed in about 25 states.

Why should physical therapists perform dry needling?

- Patients with neuromuscular pain who can't be effectively treated by surgery or other interventions need access to this targeted technique in order to prevent chronic pain, opioid dependence, work restrictions and disability.
- Physical therapists are uniquely qualified to perform dry needling because they have the education, training and expertise in the biomedical sciences and how to treat neuromuscular injuries and pain conditions.
- Dry needling is safe when performed by physical therapists. In a study published in the *Journal of Manual and Manipulative Therapy* in 2013, researchers reported that the risk of adverse effects of dry needling performed by physical therapists is less than 0.04 percent - lower than for common over-the-counter pain medication such as ibuprofen (.137 percent).

What education is needed to perform dry needling?

- According to an independent report commissioned by the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy and published in 2015, entry-level DPT programs provide more than four-fifths (86 percent) of the relevant knowledge requirements needed to be competent in dry needling. This coursework includes evaluation, assessment, diagnosis and plan of care development, documentation, safety, and professional responsibilities.
- The additional advanced training required for physical therapists to perform dry needling is almost solely related to the knowledge and psychomotor skills relating to needle technique such as palpation and selection, placement, handling and manipulation of needles
- Fifty-four hours of post-licensure continuing education is the average length of the advanced, post-graduate training for dry needling.
- Dry needling continuing education is readily available across the United States and Canada. It's taught by MDs and physical therapists at many medical institutions and clinics, including the University of British Columbia.