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## **ACUPUNCTURE vs DRY NEEDLING: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?** **AUSTRALIA'S LEADING ACUPUNCTURE ASSOCIATION EXPLAINS**

*"In the interests of public safety, people need to be aware of the difference between registered acupuncturists and other unregistered therapists doing dry needling"*

*"Patient safety is paramount, so dry needling performed by an under-qualified or unqualified practitioner should definitely be avoided"*

**AUSTRALIA:** Over the last year, there has been a significant increase in Australians seeking Allied Health services, specifically acupuncture. And while to the untrained eye, dry needling and acupuncture might seem like the same thing; the reality is there is a vast difference; one requires only a few hours of online training, the other years of study.

Acupuncture in all its forms has been used for thousands of years to effectively treat various health conditions and maintain general health and wellbeing. 'Ah shi' acupuncture is just one of these – but a seemingly similar treatment, known as 'trigger point dry needling,' has gained popularity in recent years.

"Anyone can do a dry needling course over a weekend and then stick needles in people on Monday," says Waveny Holland, president of the Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association. "Chinese medicine acupuncturists have to do a four-year bachelor's degree, which includes 1000 hours of clinical practice, before they can register to practice. Compared to the training of people who do a weekend course, or courses of up to 80 hours, it is a very obvious choice to get a practitioner with superior training, knowledge and skills to ensure a safe treatment."

Acupuncturists in Australia must complete intensive university training before registering to practice with the Chinese Medicine Board of Australia under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (2009). Those offering dry needling do not.

"As long as they don't call themselves 'acupuncturists,' they are free to practice with [in some cases] as little as 20 hours online training," says Waveny, explaining that only those who've completed the appropriate four-year degree and associated prac hours can use the protected title 'acupuncturist.' "So, in the interests of public safety, people need to be aware of the difference between registered acupuncturists and other unregistered therapists doing acupuncture."

Acupuncturists have to follow strict guidelines and codes of practice to ensure their patients' wellbeing and safety. Under the National Law (2009), the title of 'acupuncturist' is protected – but performing acupuncture or dry needling, which is what an acupuncturist does, is not protected. This means anyone – including physiotherapists, chiropractors, massage therapists, naturopaths, beauty therapists, and more – can perform acupuncture or dry needling with very minimal hours of training.

## Getting the right treatment for you

Commonly, acupuncture involves the insertion of very fine, sterile, single-use needles into different acupuncture points along the body's energy channels, also known as meridians. Gentle stimulation moves and balances the energy, or Qi, flowing through these channels to treat various health conditions or maintain wellbeing. Patient safety is paramount so dry needling performed by an under-qualified or unqualified practitioner should definitely be avoided.

Many types of acupuncture treatments have been scientifically shown to be effective, including auricular or ear acupuncture, which is often employed in the treatment of addictions and may involve tiny rounded press studs that are sealed in place for a few days. Each ear has several acupuncture points corresponding to different parts of the body and may be used to treat various conditions.

Electro-acupuncture has been used in China since the 1950s, and in this treatment, the needles are stimulated by a very mild electric current similar in action to a TENS machine. Patients might feel a tingling sensation or a slight vibration but shouldn't feel any pain.

If the idea of needles has you running scared, accredited acupuncturists learn many needle-free options, too. Tui na (traditional Chinese remedial massage) and acupressure can also yield good results, with the practitioner pressing or massaging the acupuncture points to release qi blockages instead of using needles. Laser acupuncture – also used in China since the 1950s – may also provide a very useful treatment option for people who are needle-averse. The needles are replaced with a low-level intensity light laser. Moxibustion uses heat produced by burning the leaves of the *artemisia vulgaris* (mugwort) plant to warm and stimulate the acupuncture points.

Of course, qualified acupuncturists are also trained in a host of other traditional Chinese treatments, and can do so much more for patients than just inserting needles – from prescribing traditional Chinese medicinal herbs and nutritional advice to offering cupping and massage treatments, and even simply lending a kind and understanding ear.

“As our appointments are usually 45 minutes to an hour, we spend time with patients, so people can actually talk through their fears and needs and desires,” explains Waveny. “Having the opportunity to just chat to someone can help ease a busy mind – and that's a very powerful part of what we do to maintain wellness. Simply talking can be extremely therapeutic without even putting a needle in.”

## How to find a qualified Acupuncturist:

To find a qualified and registered acupuncturist, search the free [AACMA database](#). All AACMA member practitioners are registered with the Chinese Medicine Board of Australia and have completed the necessary university degree and associated practical hours to practice, so you can rest assured you're in safe hands.

For interviews with AACMA president Waveny Holland or to speak to a local accredited acupuncturist, contact Amanda Kuhn ([amanda@missymischief.com](mailto:amanda@missymischief.com))



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### **Who is the Australian Acupuncture & Chinese Medicine Association Ltd (AACMA)?**

The AACMA was established in 1973 when traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) was relatively unknown by the western population of Australia. Today, the association represents the majority of qualified acupuncture and TCM practitioners in Australia. We encourage and enable our members to grow as TCM practitioners through professional development opportunities, research and collaboration.