

Integrating Acupuncture into Modern Medical Practice: Development and Outcomes of a Physician Training Program at a Major Academic Medical Center

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Background

Acupuncture is an ancient medical practice that involves the insertion of fine needles into specific points on the body to regulate the flow of energy (qi), alleviate pain, and promote healing. In recent years, there has been growing interest among patients and providers in integrating acupuncture into mainstream medical care. In response to increasing patient demand and limited availability of trained providers, we developed an acupuncture curriculum at a major hospital in Southwest Virginia, Carilion Clinic. The program was designed to train practicing physicians and medical trainees in evidence-based acupuncture techniques for integration into their clinical specialties.

Methods

The acupuncture training program was created in accordance with the Virginia medical board's requirement of 200 hours of training, including 50 hours of in-person instruction and 150 hours of self-directed online learning.

Methods...

The curriculum was delivered in four structured phases and covered key topics such as acupuncture theory, the acupoint system, acupressure, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) principles, and integrative health practices. The program incorporated two hands-on 3.5-day clinical immersion sessions. Trainee progress and alumni outcomes were tracked through regular surveys, feedback forms, and employment follow-up. Despite limited faculty (only two physician-acupuncturists) and no institutional seed funding, the program was launched with institutional space and operational support through registration fees.

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Development of a Comprehensive Acupuncture Training Curriculum at an Academic Medical Center in Southwest Virginia

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ABSTRACT

Background: Acupuncture is an ancient practice that involves fine needle insertion into specific points on the body to regulate the flow of energy (qi), alleviate pain, and promote healing. In the United States, acupuncture education and training mainly occur within schools for acupuncture and oriental medicine (AOM). However, more and more academic institutions are now adopting acupuncture and providing it to patients. In this manuscript, we discuss an acupuncture training curriculum devised by Carilion Clinic in Southwest Virginia.

Results

The inaugural cohort consisted of 28 participants, including 23 practicing physicians, 2 residents, and 3 medical students from a variety of specialties such as family medicine, internal medicine, emergency medicine, OB-GYN, and neurology. We successfully graduated 15 participants from the program. Early feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, indicating high satisfaction with course content, structure, and applicability to clinical practice. Demand for future offerings has increased, and institutional support has remained strong. Financially, the program yielded a net profit of \$15,000 for the hospital in its first year. Integration of acupuncture into clinical service lines, including pain management, oncology, and sports medicine, is underway.

Conclusion

This innovative acupuncture training program demonstrates the feasibility and value of implementing physician-acupuncture education within a major medical institution. It addresses growing patient demand for nonpharmacologic, integrative treatments and supports provider education across diverse specialties. Despite early logistical and cultural challenges, the program has proven to be both clinically impactful and financially sustainable. Future work will focus on tracking alumni practice patterns and expanding training opportunities to meet ongoing regional demand.

References

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