

TO: Senator Claire Ayer, Chair, Committee on Health and Welfare
FROM: Paul Harrington, Executive Vice President, Vermont Medical Society
RE: Vermont Medical Society support for H. 690, as passed by the House of Representatives
DATE: April 6, 2016

H.690 would allow physicians, osteopaths and physician assistants to practice acupuncture within the scope of their professional practice. Under current law, physicians are permitted to practice dentistry, psychology, physical therapy, naturopathy and chiropractic medicine under their medical license. However, they are not permitted to practice acupuncture without obtaining a separate license under 26 VSA Section 3402.

The Board of Medical Practice supports H.690 as an appropriate amendment of the statutes to allow physicians, osteopaths and physician assistants to use acupuncture in their practice without having to obtain a separate acupuncture license.

A number of Vermont physicians have studied acupuncture during their medical schooling. A Rutland physician indicated her internship involved over 300 hours of study and practice based on the Helms technique which was accredited by the American Academy of Medical Acupuncture and during her residency she continued to study acupuncture with her program director.

A large part of her current practice involves pain management and an important part of her treatment alternatives in some instances would be acupuncture. Unfortunately, because physicians require a special license to practice acupuncture in Vermont, she is not able to offer this treatment to her patients. In order to receive the standalone acupuncture license, she may need to undergo approximately 1600 hours of study, which does not consider or recognize her significant training as a physician. She stated this is prohibitive, and not consistent with many other states where physicians with training in acupuncture are able to practice without such license.

In September 2015, Massachusetts General Hospital/Harvard University researchers published a study finding that repeated acupuncture treatment might reduce or eliminate the need for opioids by restoring the balance in key brain regions, and altering pain-related attention and memory. Given the need to reduce reliance on opioids for chronic pain control, the VMS believes Vermont law should encourage trained physicians to use alternatives, such as acupuncture, for pain relief.

The Vermont Acupuncture Association, representing licensed acupuncturists of Vermont, expressed its support to the committee for the practice of acupuncture by licensed physicians with training according to the WHO physician acupuncture training standards. It therefore supports H.690, which creates a standardized exemption for these physicians, osteopaths and physician assistants to practice acupuncture within the scope of their professional practice.

The Vermont Medical Society supports the passage of H.690, as passed by the House of Representatives, to allow physicians, osteopaths and physician assistants to practice acupuncture within the scope of their professional practice.