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Re: SB232/HB172

Dear Maryland lawmakers:

Although I am a resident of your neighbor, Pennsylvania, and so not immediately impacted by your proposed rules changes, in our young and marginalized profession we are all affected by every new precedent. I therefore write today with a sense of urgency, feeling my profession and livelihood are at stake.

It is a curious position to be in, being a modern, well-educated and rational American practicing ancient Chinese medicine. Most of us became acupuncturists due to our own personal experience with this medicine -- I certainly did. Among other things, it was a mystery -- it plainly helped me when Western medicine could not, yet I could make no sense of it. When I entered acupuncture school in 1996 I quickly realized that I had to let go of what I already knew and try to understand Chinese medicine on its own terms. I have been licensed and in private practice for 23 years now, and still must continually, humbly accept Chinese medicine on its own terms. However, in doing so my understanding and ability to practice has only grown and expanded, and I expect this growth and expansion to continue for the rest of my life. The pandemic was a good example of this growth -- I was trained in pandemic Chinese medicine but never expected to use it. However, when Covid 19 arrived and I started treating people for chronic and acute forms of the disease my patients had excellent results. I couldn't have guessed that this would be the case, but by continually honing my skills and returning over and over to the basic premises of Chinese medicine, I was in an excellent position to help my patients when this new scourge arrived. This required an ongoing commitment to the medicine -- I didn't just open a book and follow a recipe. Forming treatment plans, developing needling protocols and counselling my patients on associated therapeutics were all crucial to their success, and were only possible because I have been a serious student of this medicine for almost three decades.

Mostly we American acupuncturists have accepted our place in the medical establishment -- on the fringes. That included regular scornful treatment from physicians and other members of the establishment when I first started in 2000. However, as time has gone on and acupuncture and other Chinese modalities have proven themselves over and over again, not just to individual patients, but to the Veterans' Administration, Medicare, Workers' Compensation Boards and other shrewd purchasers of healthcare, the establishment's scorn has almost instantly switched to covetousness. Now many physical therapists, chiropractors, athletic trainers and other practitioners regularly use

cupping, tui na ("scraping"), tui na (Chinese medical massage) techniques and other non-invasive forms of traditional Chinese medicine. This makes us grind our teeth, and the "scientific" rationalizations of why and where these techniques originated are laughable, but we have been patient and silent. But now they are coming for acupuncture and we must speak up.

Many vendors of weight loss and other highly marketable supplements have used cursory knowledge of Chinese herbal medicine to sell formulas that turned out to be highly dangerous. For instance, ephedra is no longer available to we responsible practitioners of Chinese medicine because it was mis-used by some in the supplement industry, and people died. To be clear: ephedra was used for thousands of years in Chinese medical formulas and there was no problem, and therefore no need to prohibit its use. Within five years of it being appropriated by irresponsible, profit-driven people who were disrespectful of its origins, traditions and appropriate use, it was ruined for everyone, especially the people who died. But it also hurt we who know how to use it, and the patients who would benefit from its appropriate use. This is the appropriate comparison for efforts to allow non-trained people to use acupuncture needles. "Dry needling" is a disrespectful scam, a dishonest theft and a dangerous development to both our profession and to patients. Long needles are used in a reckless way by practitioners who otherwise are not legally allowed to penetrate the body. There will be injuries and there will be deaths. Lawmakers will then conclude that acupuncture is dangerous and will forbid we licensed, trained acupuncturists from practicing this medicine that some of us have practiced safely for decades. Until this day arrives, the reputation of our profession will be muddied, confused and sullied by the inferior, amateurish and dangerous fumbling of the profit-driven dilettantes who decide to try a little "dry needling" to bring in some more revenue. You couldn't plan a more efficient strategy for destroying a branch of healthcare.

The solution is simple: if athletic trainers, physical therapists or other healthcare providers want to practice acupuncture, let them attend acupuncture school, qualify for a state license and open a practice. Otherwise, it makes no more sense to allow them to treat people with acupuncture needles than it would make to allow me to treat people with antibiotics or steroids. It is dangerous to patients and diminishes the branch of medicine that developed the technique.

Please protect your constituents and our profession by voting NO on these bills. If action on acupuncture is required, please consider expanding your definitions of "healthcare provider" to include licensed acupuncturists, and please consider adding acupuncture performed by licensed acupuncturists to your state employees' healthcare coverage. I am confident that you will quickly see how effective and economical acupuncture performed by trained, skilled and licensed practitioners can be.

Thank you for your consideration.

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