



This column addresses the legislative and regulatory activity and topics of interest currently being addressed in various jurisdictions.

Can Physical Therapists Do Dry Needling?

The volume of activity in the states from March 2010 through May 2012 regarding Dry Needling or Intramuscular Manual Therapy (for now, terms which may be used synonymously) has necessitated three versions of the FSBPT resource paper on the topic. To illustrate this point, the 3rd edition of the paper was published in early August 2012 and there is already a change to be made; another state (WV) has recently determined that dry needling is within the scope of practice of physical therapists. Many boards have been approached to give an opinion as to whether physical therapists in that jurisdiction can legally perform dry needling. As each state is independent to determine its own laws and rules, board opinions and actions have varied widely creating inconsistent requirements for physical therapy practice from state to state.

Dry needling has grown in popularity but is still a relatively unique part of physical therapy practice. Dry needling is also known as intramuscular manual therapy, trigger point dry needling, or intramuscular needling. Beginning in 2009, the American Physical Therapy Association had recommended the use of the term "intramuscular manual therapy" to describe the intervention provided by physical therapists. However now the organization has begun using dry needling as the term of choice. Although currently they have no official position on dry needling, APTA contends that dry needling is not inconsistent with the *Guide to Physical Therapist Practice*. The silence left by no public position was proving difficult for the dry needling community. In response, in January, APTA published an educational resource paper

titled **Physical Therapists & the Performance of Dry Needling**. According to their paper, the document was meant to provide background information for state chapters, regulatory entities, and providers who are dealing with the issue of dry needling.

As of August 2012, there are 27 jurisdictions that have definitively ruled that dry needling is allowed by PTs, and 7 that have ruled definitively that it is not in the scope of practice of PTs. Only two years previous, a mere 15 licensing boards had issued interpretive opinions or rules that dry needling/ Intra-muscular manual therapy was within the scope of physical therapy practice: AL, CO, DC, GA, KY, LA, MD, NM, NH, NJ, OH, OR, SC, VA, and WY. Oregon's position continues to be under scrutiny however, and may better be described as cautiously neutral at this time.

There are currently no consistent profession-wide standards/competencies defined for the performance of dry needling. Each state has defined its own requirements. The states have taken very different paths on training requirements. Some have been very prescriptive requiring a certain number of hours and years of experience before practicing the technique while others refer to the self-policing of professionals to do only what you are trained and competent to do.

It is not unusual for a state licensing board to be asked for an opinion as to whether or not an evaluative technique, treatment, or procedure is within the scope of practice for that given profession. It is as important to base regulation on evidence, when possible, as it is to base practice on evidence. Physical therapists have a long history of treating myofascial pain and trigger points. Dry needling is an intervention to address these problems. It is not the sole intervention, merely a tool used by PTs. The needle insertion is used to create a twitch response in the muscle to help promote relaxation of the fibers; there is no use of energy flow or meridians. Physical therapists **do not** use dry needling to address things such as fertility, smoking cessation, allergies, depression or other non-neuro-musculoskeletal conditions. Overall, an important distinction is that acupuncture is an entire discipline and profession where as dry needling is merely one technique which should be available to any professional with the appropriate background and training.

For a full list of jurisdictions which have approved dry needling to be used by PTs or for a list of specific training requirements, access the FSBPT resource paper via the members section of the FSBPT website or contact Professional Standards at FSBPT.

MAP AS OF 5/31/2012 (as of 8/2012 WV is now "allowed")

DRY NEEDLING IN THE USA

- - ALLOWED
- - UNCLEAR
- - PROHIBITED

