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Acupuncture in Alaska

REPORT FROM PAMELA D. PRICE, PHD, LAC, DIPL.AC.

Pamela Price

After years of functioning without an organized body, we are pleased to report that Alaska now has its own acupuncture association. The new organization's name is the Acupuncture Association of Alaska and is headquartered in Homer, Alaska. The group was officially created last October, with officers being elected on January 9th of this year.

Acupuncture Association of Alaska

Officers

President: Pamela D. Price, PhD, LAc, Dipl.Ac. (Homer)
Vice President: Daniel J. Young, ND, LAc (Eagle River)
Secretary: Kelly Sandberg, LAc, Dipl.Ac (Anchorage)
Treasurer: Rosemary Cody, MTOM, LAc, Dipl.Ac. (Anchorage)
Legislative Liaison: Valerie DeLaune, LAc, Dipl.Ac (Juneau)

Directors

Peter Chong, PhD, LAc (Anchorage)
Bong Kim, L.Ac (Anchorage)
Greg Singer, LAc, Dipl.Ac (Anchorage)
Jayne Sontag, LAc, Dipl.Ac (Anchorage)

Our primary objective this year is to have acupuncturists included in section 21.36.090(d) of the state statute pertaining to insurance coverage and unfair discrimination by insurance companies. This is the first organized attempt to convince our legislators (many of whom do use alternative care, specifically acupuncture) to add us to the statute.

Unfortunately, our legislators are swamped with many pressing bills and amendments during this session, so we are pursuing a different route. We have learned the legislative process can be painstakingly slow! We have also learned how the process works; it's amazing that any bills or amendments can possibly get through all the committees in one session. (In Alaska, legislation must go through six committees before passing, if it doesn't require modification, which it usually does).

For any acupuncture organization, a few words of caution and advice:

- Be well prepared.
- Have a liaison/lobbyist work directly for your association. (We have our own liaison, but no lobbyist.)
- Have your packets well documented and organized in a nice binder with indexing. (It's hard to believe, but people sometimes do submit bills in unintelligible, handwritten form without documentation.)
- Highlight which states already have this statute so that your legislators won't think they are

the first to do so; otherwise, they will not even attempt it. Also, be sure to highlight states that already have acupuncturists in their health insurance statutes (i.e., AllState of Washington; Blue Cross of California, Kaiser Permanente of Ohio).

- The big question your legislators will want to know the answer to is: Does it cost us (the state or state employees) more in premiums? If it does not, you've got a good chance at success.
- Have your members talk with every representative and state senator in your district. It takes about \$20,000 to have a person round up petition signatures from enough registered voters - about a dollar per signature. It's a slow and cumbersome process at best, but that's the way it is.

A few years ago, before we became an organization, several acupuncturists in Alaska tried to get this amendment passed. We as an organization are now taking up the gauntlet, so to speak, and are working diligently toward our goal.

Take heart, those of you in the lower 48. It will work: it just takes time. In the meantime, we'd appreciate you contacting us with any information you might have filed away to assist our cause. This is not just for Alaska: it's for the benefit of acupuncturists everywhere. We will gladly share our information with you!

Editor's note: If there are acupuncture-related news items in your area that you feel would be of interest to the profession, please send them to Acupuncture Today by phone (714-960-3268), fax (714-536-1482) e-mail editorial@acupuncturetoday.com or regular mail (*Acupuncture Today*, PO Box 6070, Huntington Beach, CA 92615-6070).

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