

# Assembly Bill 1943 Passes in California

Editorial Staff

On September 23, Governor Gray Davis signed into law Assembly Bill 1943, increasing curriculum hours for students who enter acupuncture training programs and requiring that such programs have a minimum number of educational hours to receive approval from the California Acupuncture Board. The bill, introduced by Assemblywoman Judy Chu of Monterey Park, is the result of several months of debate among representatives of the acupuncture profession, and springs from recommendations adopted by the Board earlier this year.

"I applaud Governor Davis for his approval on AB 1943 and his support for the Oriental medicine and acupuncture profession," commented Assemblywoman Chu. "This bill represents a major victory for the acupuncture profession and one step toward greater acceptance of the Asian healing arts in California's health care system."

## History of Assembly Bill 1943

Prior to the passage of AB 1943, California law required that acupuncture and Oriental medicine training programs include a curriculum with a minimum of 2,348 hours of education. Those standards had not changed since 1984, however, and by the time AB 1943 was introduced, most acupuncture schools in California already had training programs in excess of 2,348 hours.

Furthermore, many state acupuncture associations, along with numerous individual acupuncturists and some schools, believed that increased educational standards would result in more knowledgeable acupuncture practitioners, who would be better prepared to meet a steadily growing demand for treatment. Having better educated practitioners would also increase the quality of care delivered to consumers and help maintain the profession's favorable safety record.

As a result, the California Acupuncture Board's Task Force on Competencies and Outcomes conducted a series of meetings at the beginning of the year to determine a minimum number of curriculum hours for acupuncture programs. After several meetings, the Task Force voted in April to recommend a curriculum of no less than 3,000 hours. The Board adopted the Task Force's recommendations in May.

While the Task Force began evaluating curriculum hours, Assemblywoman Chu introduced AB 1943 to the Legislature. In April, after undergoing a series of amendments, the bill was reviewed by three Assembly committees before being sent to the floor of the Assembly, where it passed 61-16. It was then sent to the Senate, where it was reviewed by the Appropriations and Business & Professions committees. After another round of amendments, on August 26, AB 1943 passed the Senate and was referred back to the Assembly, which approved the final version of the bill two days later. The bill was then enrolled and sent to Governor Davis, who signed it into law.

More than two dozen organizations voiced their support for AB 1943, including the American Association of Oriental Medicine, the National Guild for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, the Florida State Oriental Medicine Association, and nine professional acupuncture organizations in California. Several individual acupuncturists and students also sent letters in support of the bill to

the Legislature.

## Analysis of Assembly Bill 1943

The final version of AB 1943 accomplishes four objectives:

1. It provides that in the event of the passage of Senate Bill 1951, the Legislature will consider the recommendations of the Little Hoover Commission to increase curriculum hours for the licensure of acupuncturists in excess of 3,000 hours up to 4,000 hours so that they can fully and effectively provide health services under their scope of practice as written in California law. (*Editor's note:* Senate Bill 1951, which extends the life of the California Acupuncture Board through July 1, 2005, was passed by Governor Davis on September 19. An analysis of SB 1951 will appear in the December issue.)
2. It provides that the Little Hoover Commission will offer recommendations for reviewing the competency of licensed acupuncturists who are not subject to the 3,000 hour minimum requirement, and will also provide recommendations for any training, testing or continuing education classes required these acupuncturists may need to continue to meet the standards for licensure in California.
3. It requires the California Acupuncture Board to establish specific standards for the approval of schools and colleges that offer acupuncture education and training, including standards for faculty. These standards must be established by January 1, 2004. Within three years of being initially approved, every school will be reviewed by the Board to make sure they comply with certain educational standards. Programs that do not meet these standards will automatically lose Board approval.
4. It mandates that all California schools that offer a program in acupuncture "shall include a minimum of 3,000 hours of study in curriculum pertaining to the practice of an acupuncturist" in order for the school to receive approval from the California Acupuncture Board. This requirement applies to all students entering acupuncture training programs on or after January 1, 2005.

The passage of AB 1943 will have a similar effect on several schools across the country. Ten of the 24 programs currently approved by the Board are in states other than California; of those 10, six have curricula that total less than 3,000 hours. Those schools will also have to comply with AB 1943's educational standards or face losing Board approval.

### New Standards May Pose a Challenge to Some Schools

If AB 1943 were to go into effect today, many of the ACAOM-accredited or candidate programs in California would not meet the new curriculum hour requirement. Complicating matters is the fact that in addition to the number of hours being raised, the Acupuncture Board can decide where those hours will be allocated (for example, the Board could decide to increase the minimum number of clinic hours, or require more training in herbal medicine). In essence, every Board-approved program may be subject to change depending on where and how the new curriculum hours are allocated. However, since the law does not go into effect until 2005, and since schools will have a full year to implement and changes promulgated by the Board, the financial impact of AB 1943 on most acupuncture programs is expected to be minimal.

To see how the passage of Assembly Bill 1943 will affect acupuncture programs in California, *Acupuncture Today* has assembled the following chart, which contains the current number of curriculum hours for each ACAOM-accredited or candidate school. (*Editor's note:* Curriculum information was obtained via school catalogs and discussions with school officials. The actual number of curriculum hours included in a school's listing may vary from the numbers presented below depending on the method used to tabulate those hours.)

| Curriculum Hours, ACAOM-Accredited/Candidate Schools in California |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| School   | Program Hours<br>(as of October 1, 2002)   | Number of Hours<br>Needed to Reach<br>3,000  |
| Academy of Chinese Culture and Health Sciences                     | Didactic: 1,740 (+ 330 corequisite science hours)<br>Clinic: 900<br>Total: 2,970 (3,300 including corequisite hours) | 30 (not counting corequisite science hours)  |
| American College of Traditional Chinese Medicine                   | Didactic: 2,013 (includes general science and foundation courses)<br>Clinic: 887<br>Total: 2,900                     | 100  |
| China International Medical University                             | Didactic: 2,040<br>Clinic: 870<br>Total: 2,910   | 90   |
| Dongguk Royal University   | Didactic: 1,970<br>Clinic: 840<br>Total: 2,810   | 190  |
| Emperor's College of Traditional Oriental Medicine                 | Didactic: 2,110<br>Clinic: 950<br>Total: 3,060   |  |
| Five Branches Institute  | Didactic: 1,680<br>Clinic: 867<br>Total: 2,547   | 453  |
| Meiji College of Oriental Medicine                                 | Didactic: 1,410<br>Clinic: 1,110<br>Total: 2,520   | 480  |
| Pacific College of Oriental Medicine                               | Didactic: 2,360<br>Clinic: 900<br>Total: 3,260   |  |
| Samra University of Oriental Medicine                              | Didactic: 1,792<br>Clinic: 900<br>Total: 2,692   | 308 (Note: Beginning with the Winter 2002 term, Samra's program will be expanded to 3,220 hours) |
| Santa Barbara College of Oriental Medicine                         | Didactic: 1,636 (plus master's degree project)<br>Clinic: 1,086<br>Total: 2,722                                      | 278  |
| South Baylo University   | Didactic: 2,189<br>Clinic: 840<br>Total: 3,029   |  |
| Yo San University of Traditional Chinese Medicine                  | Didactic: 2,170<br>Clinic: 992<br>Total: 3,162   |  |

The full text of Assembly Bill 1943, along with a history of the legislation and analyses by the Senate and Assembly, is available online at [www.leginfo.ca.gov](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov). To access the bill, click the "Bill

Information" button, then enter AB 1943 in the "Bill Number" field.

### Your Feedback Wanted

What effect do you think AB 1943 will have on the profession? We would like to hear from you. If you have a comment or concern about the bill, please contact us by fax or e-mail at the address below. Please submit your comments to us by December 15, 2002. Responses to this article will be printed in an upcoming issue of *Acupuncture Today*.

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