

AAAOM Answers Acupuncture Critics

AAAOM Staff

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We felt compelled to respond to the Dec. 6, 2009, *Los Angeles Times* article in which Kim Geiger and Tom Hamburger were fairly critical of complementary medicine.¹

Regarding the Senate health care reform bill, they write, "Acupuncturists, dietary-supplement makers and other alternative health practitioners, some of whose treatments are considered unproven by the medical establishment, would be brought more squarely into the mainstream of American medicine under the health legislation now before the Senate."

The article goes on to state:

"Insurers and some scientific watchdogs say the measure would undermine one of the central principles of the healthcare overhaul: that the system cut costs by eliminating medical treatments that aren't proven effective.

"These provisions are anti-science and anti-consumer,' said Dr. Steven Novella, a professor of neurology at Yale School of Medicine, who is mobilizing opposition to the Senate bill.

"The leading champion of these measures is Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa), chairman of the Senate Health Committee, who credits bee-pollen pills with curing his seasonal allergies. He is also the leading recipient in Congress of campaign donations from chiropractors and dietary-supplement makers."

In terms of opposition to the health care reform bill, the article notes: "The American Medical Assn. has been largely muted in its response to the Senate provisions. But a coalition of 19 physician groups wrote to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) to protest the 'nondiscrimination' provision, claiming it 'would create patient confusion over greatly differing levels of education, skills and training among healthcare professionals.'"

On the bright side, the article did include some positive statements by AAAOM's lobbyist: "These are practices that are well-established,' said Beth Clay, a lobbyist who represents acupuncturists. 'They've been around for decades or centuries. They are regulated, as is appropriate for medicine, at the state level.'"

Our Open Response

Regarding the Dec. 6, 2009 article, "A Broader Definition of Healthcare," the American Association of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (AAAOM) would like to comment on several important distinctions about acupuncture and Oriental medicine (AOM) and its status in the U.S. AAAOM is

the sole national organization representing licensed acupuncturists and AOM students in the United States.

The AOM community is decidedly pro-science and actively engages in many forms of peer-reviewed research, including high-quality clinical trials. There is a growing body of scientific evidence, both in the United States and abroad, supporting the benefits and cost-effectiveness of acupuncture and other modalities of Oriental medicine. News outlets and scientific journals frequently report the outcomes of studies focused on acupuncture efficacy. In fact, the *Los Angeles Times* [touted acupuncture's impact](#) on the brain's opioid receptors as recently as Aug. 10, 2009.²

There are more than 50 acupuncture studies in the well-respected Cochrane Database indicating that, according to biomedicine's own gold standard, acupuncture has shown itself to be equal to or superior to conventional medical options for a number of medical conditions.

Even President Obama has commented upon the effectiveness of acupuncture for certain conditions. At a Missouri presidential town hall meeting, [he stated](#): "It is pretty well documented through scientific studies that acupuncture, for example, can be very helpful in relieving certain things like migraines and other ailments, or are at least as effective as more intrusive interventions."⁴

In addition, our professional community is pro-consumer, in terms of promoting and adherence to high ethical standards to protect the public from harm and expand the array and accessibility of health care choices available to the American consumer. Numerous studies have demonstrated that acupuncture is safe and effective when administered by a licensed professional who has completed extensive professional training in acupuncture and Oriental medicine.

As for the perceived lobbyist influence noted in the article, we can only point to the vast discrepancies that exist in lobbyist spending. According to Oct. 26, 2009, data from the Center for Responsive Politics, the 2009 top industry in terms of lobbyist spending is [pharmaceuticals/health products](#), with a staggering \$199,323,702 that involves 1,659 lobbyists.³ Coming in as a close second is insurance with \$122,065,251 in lobbyist spending.

Licensed acupuncturists are highly qualified health care professionals who proactively research and advance their medicine to provide safe, cost-effective accessible health care. We are confident that if the medically proven facts were better known, the public and professional communities would favor inclusion of natural and complementary therapies such as acupuncture and Oriental medicine in health care reform. We hope that in your mission to provide complete, unbiased information to your readers, you will interview one or more licensed practitioners about natural and complementary medicine and its important role in the health care reform debate.

References

1. [A broader definition of healthcare](#). *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 6. 2009.
2. [Acupuncture boosts effects of painkillers, natural or prescription](#). *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 10, 2009.
3. www.opensecrets.org/lobby/top.php?showYear=2009&indexType=i
4. [Obama positive toward acupuncture](#). *Acupuncture Today* 2009;7(10).

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