



ACUPUNCTURE TECHNIQUES

Southwest Acupuncture College Brings It to Division 1 Athletes

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When Michael Phelps' photograph with the distinctive round marks left by cupping went viral, the Division 1 student athletes treated through the Dal Ward Athletic Center at the University of Colorado (CU) could relate. Since January 2014, the Boulder Campus of Southwest Acupuncture College (SWAC) has operated an extern clinic in CU's student athletic facility staffed by senior interns, who qualify through academic and clinical performance to treat as part of an integrated health care team.

The SWAC extern clinic at Dal Ward offers free treatments to any of CU's student athletes who wish to avail themselves of the service. Interns treat under the supervision of Associate Professor Amy Dickinson, LAc, who is a sports acupuncture specialist with 13 years of clinical experience.

The Boulder Campus of SWAC has a long tradition of providing its students with many opportunities to specialize in sports acupuncture. The sports acupuncture specialty clinics were founded within the college's acupuncture clinic in 1999 by Whitfield Reaves, LAc, who wrote the *Acupuncture Handbook of Sports Injuries & Pain* while he was on the faculty of SWAC, and who designed the curriculum the college uses for training sports acupuncture specialists. The college began offering coursework in 2000 based on Dr. Janet Travell's identification of trigger points combined with acupuncture.

The college's home in Boulder, Colo. often appears in national picks for "Most Active Cities in America," so the pairing of an acupuncture college extern site in a facility that serves Division 1 student athletes was a partnership where, in the words of Dickinson, "everybody wins."

Sports Acupuncture Provides Integrated Treatment

Sports acupuncture builds on the already extensive standard curriculum in bioscience required in accredited acupuncture colleges by adding specialized instruction in sports injuries. Interns can

focus on whichever tissues are involved as well as the myofascial chains.



"Taking this clinic in conjunction with sports medicine classes allowed me to combine all the theory of range of motion, orthopedic testing, motor and trigger points with electric stimulation, cupping, and manual therapy and apply it consistently every day in practice," said intern Brett Knowles. Intern Christopher Smidt describes the experience in this way: "This clinic allowed me to see and work with motor chains through acupuncture theory. It allowed us as TCM practitioners to bridge the divide between western medicine treatment methods and the very ancient form of TCM. This externship had physical therapists, personal trainers, and acupuncturists working side by side."

By combining the depth of acupuncture theory with western bioscience, student athletes received the comprehensive treatment that modern acupuncture has to offer. Smidt stated, "Using appropriate TCM theory and understanding how deeply acupuncture affects mind, body, and spirit, helped in the treatment of many if not all the student athletes."

In a fast-paced integrated clinic, SWAC interns learn focused, problem-oriented treatments. Knowles related, "I was able to really hone my skills in diagnosing and treating acute musculoskeletal and soft tissue injuries quickly. In addition to using acupuncture as rehabilitation, I was able to see just how effective it can be used for prevention, strengthening, and training the athlete for peak performance."

Smidt added, "At this level, the athlete needs their machine to be ready to go. We need to give them the best assist that is possible. Many of the student athletes in this externship showed outstanding recovery when given the appropriate amount of assist."

Dickinson pointed out that the student interns were able to provide treatment for the national champion men's and women's cross country teams. "There are athletes running 90 miles a week without injury."

Dickinson has been especially appreciative about the reception among CU student athletes who receive acupuncture, "The student athletes love it and many will say that they perform better with our treatments." One success story Dickinson relates involved treatment for thoracic outlet syndrome. "The student athlete we treated had run out of options for relief short of undergoing surgery to remove a rib," said Dickinson. "We are pretty confident that the acupuncture treatment kept the surgery from being needed."

In February 2015, Colorado Women's Basketball recognized acupuncturist and clinic supervisor Amy Dickinson for her contribution to the CU student athletes by inviting her to be an honorary captain at one of the Colorado Buffaloes' women's basketball home games. The honor was complete with a pre-game announcement acknowledging Dickinson and the contribution of the acupuncture extern clinic services, the presentation of a game ball, and being an honored member of the coaching staff during the game.

Unique Experience of Working on Top Athletes

[Off-site clinics](#) at AOM schools that treat Division 1 athletes give the nation's athletes exposure to the effectiveness of acupuncture based in both TCM theory and orthopedics. As Dickinson said, "Acupuncture becomes an essential part of the athletic toolkit."

The clinics also offer the extraordinary opportunity for students to specialize while they are still in school. "Having the opportunity to work in the CU Sports Clinic was an invaluable experience. It allowed me to see what Eastern medicine can do when you specialize. This is something I would never have experienced in a conventional intern setting," said Knowles.

Intern Jordan Burk knew before entering acupuncture college that he wanted to specialize in working with athletes, and was determined to experience the SWAC CU Sports Extern Clinic. "If I could have, I would have taken this clinic every semester. The opportunity to treat high performance, Division 1 student athletes really challenged me to be more confident in my clinical abilities. I have always been the athlete being treated, but now that I am the one treating, I've noticed it's even more rewarding to help someone who is working their hardest day in and day out."

The Gift that Gives and Receives

Southwest Acupuncture College, which has campuses in Boulder, Santa Fe, and Albuquerque, operates the CU student athlete externship as one of four extern sites in the Boulder area and has three additional extern clinics offered through its Santa Fe campus. Along with providing excellence in education, part of the college's mission is to cultivate service to the community. All treatments given at extern sites are offered free of charge. The extern sites are located in patient settings that are willing to integrate acupuncture services or in settings that provide care to a vulnerable population.

In Albuquerque, there are extern sites at an integrated pain center and a foster care service agency. In Santa Fe, a community acupuncture style extern clinic is held in association with an agency servicing hungry, homeless, or displaced individuals and families, including those recovering from addiction or in need of mental health services.

In Boulder, there are extern clinic sites for the clients of Bridge House, a charity that serves the homeless and working poor, a clinic for clients of the Boulder County AIDS Project, and a clinic at an assisted living center for seniors.

Student intern Heather Maya Suzuki said, "These populations happen to be the most vulnerable

and in need of the therapeutic effects of acupuncture."

Students in all extern clinics, while providing for others, also receive. According to associate professor and clinic supervisor for Boulder's Bridge House community style extern clinic, Carol Conigilaro, LAc, "Bridge House is a clinic that everyone should have to take because it will dissolve the stereotypes you hold about people even if you think you don't hold any stereotypes."

Student intern Andrew Pollack reflected on his experience. "The gift of working in a community style setting with people who have high needs and very low income is that we get to think on our feet and treat from the heart and gut without overanalyzing or trying to impress the clients with our knowledge. I am working with a transient population for whom I can't create a long-term treatment plan. All I can focus on is what needs attention today."

These extern sites are in addition to the specialty clinics for OB/gyn, oncology, sports acupuncture, Japanese-style acupuncture, Five Element acupuncture, PTSD, pediatrics, meridian therapy, and Dr. Tan pain management, all of which are offered as part of SWAC's reduced-cost college clinic. The variation in specialized clinical sites during training produces graduates who have attained advanced skills.

The use of extern clinics has brought acupuncture to populations that could not or would not likely access these services. In the process, student athletes at CU have become acupuncture enthusiasts. One of the most requested treatments? Cupping.

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