



PAIN RELIEF / PREVENTION

The AWB Opioid Initiative: Prevention and Healing for Families and Communities

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As an organization focused on healing trauma, Acupuncturists Without Borders is launching a national program to address the opioid crisis through specialized trainings and treatment protocols provided by licensed acupuncture practitioners in authorized clinical settings.

Program Basics

There is a strong link between pain, trauma and opioid dependency. Acupuncture works effectively with all three simultaneously. Patient access to these clinics will provide the opportunity to receive an acupuncture-based therapy protocol that supports individuals on their path back to balanced health and well-being. At times working closely with a referring medical practitioner, the acupuncturist will administer AWB's unique opioid response treatments that provide a time-tested alternative to the prescribing of pain medications.

The program recognizes the critical importance of providing acupuncture support for the patient's family and extended personal community, thereby reducing the collective, traumatic impact on the community at large.

AWB will partner with other natural medicine organizations already working in this field: allied health professionals and Western medical practitioners and organizations interested in finding out about how AWB's Opioid Initiative (AOI) program can assist in stemming this crisis. We will support the affiliated clinics to work in partnership with their local and regional (or statewide) public health organizations already working hard in this field; and to find ways for those partnerships to flourish and to expand the capacity for all to have an impact on this crisis.

Public and Practitioner Education and Outreach

The program will include national media and educational outreach to communities around the country about nonpharmacological alternatives to opioids. For cases involving more serious addiction, referrals will be made to professionals trained to handle this. The role of primary care in the treatment of addiction is not within the scope of the acupuncturist's practice in the AOI model.

Of course, there are situations in which the use of opioids is completely appropriate and critically needed. The training will address the issues of when opioid use is appropriate, what the treatment course could entail and when the risk of dependency is increased.

Presently, there are some communities in the U.S. in which acupuncture is being used as a therapeutic intervention for the prevention of opioid misuse and abuse, and recovery. However, those services are not readily available in many areas. AWB believes there is a critical and timely need to establish AOI- approved clinics in communities where there are licensed acupuncturists. Public and physician education about the use of AWB's Opioid Initiative program as a nonpharmacological therapy for pain, substance-use dependence, and recovery will be an

important goal of the program.

A Team-Focused Protocol

Stephanie Lyon, a pharmacist and acupuncturist, and our clinical and program director, will be developing clinically tested protocol options for de-prescribing patients from opioids, using acupuncture in a collaborative effort with prescribers. This will be a part of what AWB has to offer in our trainings, and in the ongoing clinical work that affiliated clinics will do. Critically important is that the de-prescribing protocol options must be used in collaboration with a physician. The physician or prescriber decides on the dosages for tapering, the acupuncturist provides the acupuncture, and the two work together, ideally as part of a larger multidisciplinary team.

The purpose of an AWB protocol, as taught in a formal, educational and training program, is twofold: first, to provide an acupuncture-based, therapeutic option to medication for the treatment of pain; and/or second, to provide "therapeutic support" for those who are actively taking long- or short-term opioids where risks, including possible addiction, outweigh the benefits, and desire to taper off of them under medical supervision.

In the latter scenario, the focus is on supporting the patient's natural healing resources with acupuncture and working toward cessation of opioid dependence, rather than "treating the addiction." Understanding the difference is key to what will make AWB's protocol different from what is generally provided as detox protocols in supervised clinic settings.

How to Get Involved

This program will become part of AWB's existing Community Clinic program. Practitioners who want to become part of this program will join as an AWB-affiliated clinic, and must attend our Alternatives to Opioids training to qualify.

An important part of this program will be treating family members of those impacted by the opioid crisis. This is how AWB addresses the existing trauma within the community due to the opioid crisis. AWB will use, and expand upon, its existing models for training and field service work.

Upcoming trainings for AWB's Opioid Initiative will be in New York (June 27-28) and Maine (date TBD) in September. If you would like more information or to get involved, please visit www.ACWB.info or email trainings@acuwithoutborders.org.

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