



MEDICARE LEGISLATION

What H.R. 4803 Means to Me

Kailee Carlson, RN

As a registered nurse and an acupuncture student, I know all health care professionals share a goal of providing relief for patients' chronic pain. I also know that as a nurse, I do not have nonpharmacological tools to achieve that goal. It wasn't until I worked alongside qualified acupuncturists that I felt like I understood the solution.

It was amazing to watch my patients go from a "10" on the pain scale to falling asleep comfortably after an acupuncture treatment. This experience inspired me to pursue a career as an acupuncturist.

My goal as a health care provider is for licensed acupuncturists to work synergistically with medical doctors, rather than working *under* them, or siloed from them. As a health care professional who will be practicing for many years, I know H.R. 4803, the Acupuncture for Our Seniors Act, is critical to the profession's future, as it will allow my peers and me the autonomy to treat our patients using the knowledge and training we have acquired.

A Right to Choose



Patients have a right to their choice of health care that can potentially improve their chronic pain, insomnia, headaches, GI issues, and more, *before* resorting to a pill or other invasive procedure. As a nurse working on an inpatient orthopedic floor, I understand the benefits of surgery, medication and other medical procedures in certain circumstances. I have a great respect for Western-medicine experts, including physicians, who manage that care. However, for the system to better serve patients, it needs to integrate natural and holistic medicine, including acupuncture.

This is the third in a series of articles from the ASA Advocacy Committee on "H.R. 4803: What Medicare Means to Me," looking at the impact on our patients, profession and practices. H.R. 4803 will codify licensed / qualified acupuncturists as providers under Medicare who can work and bill independently as "licensed / qualified acupuncturists." Currently, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) covers acupuncture for chronic low back pain/cLBP, but licensed / qualified acupuncturists cannot treat or bill Medicare patients because we are not recognized as providers under the Social Security Act.

Licensed acupuncturists have years of medical training and are the true experts in the practice of Eastern medicine. By spending one-on-one time with patients, acupuncturists help meet the unique needs of each patient. They have the potential to help many more people manage pain and lead healthier lives. Passing H.R. 4803 is a vital step toward that future.

H.R. 4803, which would affect more than 66 million Medicare beneficiaries, authorizes the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to recognize acupuncturists as qualified providers. This recognition would allow acupuncturists to independently treat Medicare patients and remove current supervision requirements.

Because third-party payers typically follow CMS' coverage models, H.R. 4803 would enable increased access to acupuncture services for non-Medicare beneficiaries as well, thereby making this legislation all the more important for the profession and our patients.

An Important Tool

As an orthopedic nurse, I take care of patients who have been left to manage their pain for years with very few tools other than addictive narcotics with never-ending side effects. All too often, I see cases in which narcotic use leads to addictions and overdoses. This is one of the main reasons I chose to become an acupuncturist. I feel much more empowered as a health care professional having acupuncture in my toolbox to treat acute and chronic pain.

Acupuncturists are the subject-matter experts in this medicine and have been trained, examined and demonstrated the ability to assist patients in pain management. Giving acupuncturists the autonomy to treat Medicare beneficiaries alongside our fellow medical providers is an efficient way to increase patient access to acupuncture and promote patient-centered care.

What H.R. 4803 Means to Me

H.R. 4803 is a necessary step in advancing our profession and allowing greater access to care for our patients with chronic pain. Acupuncture gives me a much-needed tool to treat my patients' chronic pain and symptoms, and I will continue to advocate for us to be recognized as key members of the health care team.

As an RN and current acupuncture student, I am so grateful to be entering this field of integrative medicine at such a pivotal time, and look forward to a lifetime of advocating for our profession and patients.

SEPTEMBER 2022