

In response to Cigna's stance, Acu-Care instituted an information campaign designed to educate and inform the insurance giant about acupuncture's benefits. First, Acu-Care contacted its network members, who in turn informed their patients of Cigna's decision. Acu-Care members also began collecting scientific abstracts, articles from peer-reviewed journals, and other information explaining acupuncture's efficacy in treating a variety of conditions, so that they could be presented to Cigna for review.

The information campaign worked better than anyone had expected. On January 25, 2001, Acu-Care was contacted by Cigna. The network was told that several patients had called Cigna to report on the benefits they had received from acupuncture, and that they demanded continuation of treatment. As a result of the response from patients and practitioners, Cigna ended up issuing a clarification to Acu-Care, informing them that the policy revision would apply only to a very limited number of HMO and point-of-service plans. Cigna also reaffirmed its position toward acupuncture, informing Acu-Care that the diagnosis guidelines for their PPO policies would remain as broad and as comprehensive as they were previously, and that PPO patients would continue to be covered for approximately 20 conditions, including back pain, bursitis, sciatica, tendonitis and tennis elbow.

"This outcome demonstrates the important role that practitioners and patients have in requesting and receiving desired health benefits," said Dr. Migdali upon hearing of Cigna's clarification.

"The results people receive from our medicine, and the type of relationship that develops between us, are both strong and influential," he continued. "I would like to see this energy used to further enhance insurance coverage and improve the reimbursement rates acupuncturists receive. Remembering this strength, accessing it and channeling it will help practitioners stand for their rights and their vision of how our medicine will be practiced. It will ultimately result in better health care."

Acu-Care's ability to develop an effective information campaign in a short amount of time provides an excellent (and all-too-rare) example of what an acupuncture organization can do if its members band together to work for a common good. Cigna's willingness to work with Acu-Care, meanwhile - and its clarification of what diagnoses would and would not be covered - shows what can happen when insurers and provider networks cooperate to try and deliver the best possible care for their patients.

Editor's note: While Cigna has clarified its position as to what diagnoses will be covered under its health care plans, Acu-Care has decided to continue gathering research and information about acupuncture. To find out more about Acu-Care, or to become involved in the network's information campaign, please contact:

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