



BILLING / FEES / INSURANCE

Washington, D.C. Updates Acupuncture Law

Alexandra Knox, MAC, LAC

We can thank our politicians in Washington, D.C. for doing a wonderful thing - even when it arrives as a bit of a paradox. In July, D.C. legislators refused to allow non-MD health care professionals to practice acupuncture with fewer than the minimum number of hours (1,725) now on the books. At the same time, they made getting a license less cumbersome. In the former case, an item in a bill that would have permitted naturopaths to practice acupuncture simply by virtue of their degrees in naturopathy was defeated. In the latter case, legislators agreed to omit the outdated requirement for physician oversight of acupuncturists, which made licensure in D.C. difficult.

It took a three-year effort by the Acupuncture Society of the District of Columbia (ASDC) to educate the City Council of the District of Columbia about our medicine and our profession. We also researched how much acupuncture is taught as part of the naturopathic curriculum in the four accredited naturopathic schools in the U.S. Naturopathic students receive introductory courses that range from 40 to 120 hours total; these figures exclude the few who pursue a dual track in acupuncture and naturopathy. The language of the bill that was finally passed reflected all of the changes that ASDC had requested. We were the only interest group to have had such success in this matter.

Teamwork, we found out, really does matter. We had invaluable assistance from our national professional organizations, such as the Council of Colleges of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, the Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine Alliance, and the American Association of Oriental Medicine. The Maryland Acupuncture Society helped ASDC enormously with a grant. Our *pro bono* lobbyist, Betsey Haywood, of the firm of Dickstein, Shapiro, Morin and Oshinsky, donated her time and wisdom, which proved crucial to our success. Finally, our fearless leader, ASDC president Lisa Eaves, can be credited for the pivotal suggestion to city council members to have Washington, D.C. come into line with national trends by deleting the much-outdated and ineffective physician oversight requirement.

JANUARY 2005