

# History in the Making through Teamwork from Oregon Practitioners and Students

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Students and staff members at the Oregon College of Oriental Medicine (OCOM) in Portland, Oregon have been working together with the Oregon Association of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (OAAOM) for the past two years to reform health care policy at a state level to increase public health insurance coverage for the use of acupuncture for certain medical conditions. As of April 1, 2012, acupuncture for the treatment of pregnancy, depression and mood disorders, tension headache and migraine has been added to the Oregon Health Plan (OHP). The OHP is equivalent to Medicaid in Oregon providing health care to those that can't afford health insurance.

Laura Ocker, LAc, now president of the OAAOM, initiated this project two years ago out of passion to expand acupuncture services to the medically underserved in Oregon. Ms. Ocker's expectation is to submit and communicate well-researched evidence on acupuncture of the highest possible caliber to the Health Evidence Review Committee (HERC), formerly known as the Health Services Commission (HSC). Her goal is to advocate for change in health care at a legislative level.

Ms. Ocker approached Ryan Milley, LAc, formerly a research associate for the OCOM Research Department, for support on this project. As part of the Master's program at OCOM, students must be involved in and complete a research project to graduate. Ryan Milley suggested student involvement and with the help of OCOM staff member Shelley M. Stump, JD, CPF as a mentor on the project, a research group was created in the fall of 2010. This research group is focused on providing high quality medical research regarding acupuncture to help educate Oregon health care public policy makers.

Research found, correlated, and corroborated by OCOM students is then given to Laura Ocker, LAc for presentation and submission to the Health Evidence Review Committee (HERC) for review. The HERC is a state agency that conducts comparative effectiveness research of health technologies. They develop and maintain a list of health services ranked by priority, from the most important to the least important, representing the comparative benefits of each service to the population to be served. The Division of Medical Assistance Programs (DMAP) decides what conditions are covered under the OHP based on HERC's prioritized list. And the funding for the conditions covered under the OHP is determined by the legislature. The prioritized list set by HERC and the OHP set by DMAP are updated every two years.

The first research group established in fall of 2010 laid the foundation for this research project. Dessa Bingley, Kami Schott, Chris Withey, Corrina Wijma, and Kim Blaufuss submitted in the summer of 2011 many high quality research articles for the treatment of acupuncture for pregnancy, depression and mood disorders, tension headache and migraine. As of April 1, 2012 these conditions are now covered for the treatment of acupuncture under the OHP.

"It is a joy to see the tide turning," says Ocker, "with acupuncture conditions now being added to OHP instead of eliminated. And while the increases are gradual, with just a few conditions tacked on at a time, it is a rather remarkable achievement considering the current budget-constrained atmosphere faced by the State. It's been a fantastic process, a true collaboration, with the OAAOM leading the advocacy piece, and OCOM supporting the process with evidence and investigation. Our colleagues at the State have been genuinely receptive."

To keep the process going, the 2012 research group will be submitting high quality research on neck pain and osteoarthritis to HERC via Ocker for the next-to-be updated prioritized list in 2014. Ben Marx, a research associate for the OCOM Research Department, has stepped in this year to help the student group refine the selection of research studies to be submitted. The 2012 research group is also working on building communication with other acupuncture schools around the nation via the American Association of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (AAAOM) by sharing our involvement and achievements at a state level in addition to encouraging other students, schools, and practitioners to get involved in their own states' health care public policy. Furthermore, the group is working on establishing a communication line to MD's and other biomedical practitioners in hopes of supporting and increasing a referral process based on patients' needs and wants for health care, including acupuncture.

The basis of this research project will be carried forward for many years to come, as each year additional conditions will be researched. With continued efforts from OCOM students and staff members, and local practitioners, more and more conditions for treatment by acupuncture will be covered under the OHP thus enhancing and improving patient access to acupuncture throughout the State of Oregon.

Through our story we hope to encourage more practitioners and students to get involved in his or her own community, city, and state regarding health care public policy reform, as well as increasing patient access to acupuncture for treatment of health conditions. Health care reform at a state level is achievable. Join your state association and help make a difference in your community that will last for generations to come!

For more information, contact Shelley Stump at [sstump@ocom.edu](mailto:ssstump@ocom.edu).

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