



COLLEGE OF NURSES
OF ONTARIO
ORDRE DES INFIRMIÈRES
ET INFIRMIERS DE L'ONTARIO

THE STANDARD OF CARE.

Performance of Acupuncture by Nurses

ORAL SUBMISSION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

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Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to present to the Standing Committee on Social Policy regarding the performance of acupuncture by nurses. My name is Anne Coghlan, and I am the Executive Director of the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO), the regulatory body for nursing in Ontario. I am here today to reinforce that the College of Nurses is supportive of nurses being able to continue to use acupuncture in their nursing practice, as a complementary therapy. Nurses historically have used the acupuncture technique of “needling” to stimulate various points on the body to encourage healing, reduce or relieve pain, and improve the function of affected areas of the body. They have focused on acupuncture as a treatment modality, within the context of Western medicine.

Many of the nurses performing acupuncture in Ontario are found in pain management centres or clinics, or in addiction counselling centres. They can also be found in any setting where patients are receiving health care services and want to combine a traditional Western medical approach with one of the complementary therapies, in order to increase the efficacy and impact of their treatment. Although nursing data is limited, a research study, published in 2003, reported that out of a sample of 215 nurses registered with the College of Nurses of Ontario, 8.7% reported using acupuncture in nursing practice. These nurses may be found in urban settings, or isolated rural locations where access to health care services and providers is severely limited.

My comments will address three specific areas – scope of nursing practice, education and standards of practice.

Scope of Practice

Ontario’s scope of practice/controlled acts model for regulated health care professionals was designed with public protection in mind. It was also designed to allow for the evolution of professions and for increased patient choice in selecting a health care provider. As a result, many of the scopes of practice statements under the *Regulated Health Professions Act* are very broad in order to enable the performance of a wide range of activities for which individual practitioners are competent and accountable. This is the case with nursing.

Nursing’s broad scope of practice statement states:

The practice of nursing is the promotion of health and the assessment of, the provision of care for and the treatment of health conditions by supportive, preventive, therapeutic, palliative and rehabilitative means in order to attain or maintain optimal function.

Nurses also have access to three of the controlled acts, one of which is the *“performance of a prescribed procedure below the dermis or a mucous membrane”*. We believe that the performance of acupuncture by nurses is captured under this specific controlled act and that nurses who have gained the in-depth knowledge base and technical skills required for the performance of acupuncture should be allowed to utilize and perform it as a therapeutic intervention.

Nursing Education

The specific knowledge, both theoretical and technical, related to the safe and effective performance of acupuncture is not a part of a nurse’s basic educational program. There is only a minor focus on complementary therapies in general, which outlines the need for an assessment process that captures the appropriateness of a complementary approach and its possible interactive effects.

What is a part of the nursing program is a solid foundational knowledge of anatomy and physiology and the interrelationships among the core body systems. Nurses study the interactions and the impact of therapeutic interventions on the core body systems and on the equilibrium or balance of human processes. They study sociological and psychological theories of human behaviour. This holistic foundational knowledge, when combined with the ability to think critically and to exercise professional judgement, allows the nurse to build upon her/his expertise through a continuous application of knowledge to new situations.

There are many examples of activities that nurses perform in their practice that grow out of their core nursing knowledge. For example, nurses in their educational programs do not learn how to insert nasogastric feeding tubes or intravenous lines, but these become elementary procedures for experienced nurses, depending upon their context of practice. These are only two examples, in addition to acupuncture, of the many activities performed by nurses that are not a part of their initial education program. Nurses do acquire the necessary knowledge and skill however, through continuing education and experiential learning.

Formal education programs are available which enable nurses and other health care disciplines to gain the core competencies necessary to perform acupuncture safely. One such program is offered at McMaster University and is targeted at nurses, physicians, chiropractors, and other regulated health care professionals.

Standards of Practice

The College has no practice standard specific to the performance of acupuncture, nor does it have a standard specific to any other activity that falls

under the controlled act of “*prescribed procedures below the dermis*”. Our practice standards and guidelines are broad by choice in order to provide guidance and set expectations for nurses that encompass all aspects of nursing practice, and to enable nurses to respond appropriately to the changing needs of our health care system.

Although our standards documents are not specific to acupuncture, the following standards and guideline do provide guidance that is relevant to the performance of acupuncture:

- Professional Standards (Standard) – provide an overall framework for the practice of nursing and include requirements relating to accountability, continuing competence, knowledge and application of knowledge.
- Decisions about Procedures and Authority (Standard) – outlines a process to be used by nurses to determine if it is appropriate for them to perform a specific procedure and if they are competent to perform the procedure.
- Infection Prevention and Control (Standard) – describes the responsibilities and accountabilities of every nurse in preventing the transmission of infection.
- Complementary Therapies (Guideline) – provides guidance to nurses and helps them determine when it is appropriate to incorporate complementary therapies, including acupuncture, into their nursing practice.

All of our standards documents address the performance of all procedures in terms of the nurse’s competency to perform the act safely, effectively and ethically.

Conclusion

The College of Nurses of Ontario believes strongly in the concept of self-regulation and holds its members accountable for the safe performance of all interventions that they carry out, including acupuncture. We are supportive that acupuncture continue to be authorized to competent regulated health care professionals as is currently stipulated in *Bill 50*.

I would be pleased to answer any questions that you might have relating to this issue.