

APTA of Massachusetts Guidelines for Practice of Dry Needling

Definition: Dry needling (Intramuscular Manual Therapy for Neuromuscular Re-education) is a skilled technique performed by a physical therapist using filiform needles to penetrate the skin and/or underlying tissues to affect change in body structures and functions for the evaluation and management of neuromusculoskeletal conditions, pain, movement impairments, and disability. Dry needling is based upon Western medical concepts; requires an examination and diagnosis, and treats specific anatomic entities selected according to physical signs.

Practice Requirements in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts:

1. The physical therapist must have documented successful completion of an approved dry needling course of study. The course must meet the following requirements:
 - a. A minimum of 24 hours of face-to-face dry needling course study; online study is not considered appropriate training.
 - b. Courses must be approved by either FSBPT, APTA, or the Massachusetts Chapter of the APTA.
2. Prior to the performance of dry needling, the physical therapist shall obtain informed consent from the patient or his representative. A patient consent form should be utilized and should clearly state that the patient is not receiving acupuncture. The consent form should also include the risks and benefits of the technique, the patient should receive a copy of the consent form, and the informed consent shall be maintained in the patient record.
3. When dry needling is performed, this must be clearly documented in the procedure notes and must indicate how the patient tolerated the technique as well as the outcome after the procedure.
4. Dry needling shall not be delegated and must be directly performed by a qualified, licensed physical therapist who has met the requirements listed above.
5. Dry needling shall only be performed by the qualified, licensed physical therapist on the anatomy that he/she has been trained in as defined by their approved coursework.
6. Dry needling shall be performed in a manner consistent with generally accepted standards of practice, including sterile needle procedures and the standards of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
7. To provide a course of instruction in dry needling in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, sponsors must document that instructors have had no less than two years of experience utilizing such techniques. Instructors need not be physical therapists, but should be licensed or certified as a healthcare provider in a jurisdiction of the United States.

These rules are intended to regulate and clarify the scope of practice for physical therapists in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Physical therapists using dry needling: do not and cannot claim to practice acupuncture; do not use acupuncture traditional Chinese medicine theories; do not use meridian acupoints and terminology; do not use acupuncture diagnosis like tongue and pulse; do not claim to stimulate auricular or distal points.