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November 3, 2011

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**Combined Sections Meeting**

February 8-11, 2012  
Chicago, IL

PT 2012  
June 6-9, 2012  
Tampa, FL

Montana Board of Physical Therapy  
301 S. Park, 4th Floor  
P.O. Box 200513  
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Members of the Board,

This letter is to provide information regarding the use of dry needling by licensed physical therapists. It is my understanding that there is some question as to whether dry needling is part of the physical therapist scope of practice and if its use by physical therapists is appropriate.

Dry needling is an intervention that is being utilized by physical therapists across the country. *The Guide to Physical Therapist Practice*, which defines much of the scope of practice of the physical therapist profession, lists numerous methods, techniques and procedural interventions a physical therapist may utilize to produce a change consistent with their diagnosis. Manual therapy techniques are designed to improve muscle function, induce relaxation and decrease pain. The intent of dry needling is compatible with this component of physical therapist practice. The procedural intervention of dry needling is therefore not inconsistent with *The Guide to Physical Therapist Practice*.

The education of physical therapists includes anatomy, histology, physiology, biomechanics, kinesiology, neuroscience, pharmacology, pathology, clinical sciences, clinical interventions, clinical applications, and screening. Much of the basic anatomical, physiological and biomechanical knowledge that dry needling utilizes is taught as part of the core physical therapist education; the specific dry needling skills are supplemental to that knowledge and not exclusive to acupuncture. Physical therapists are bound by their license to practice safely and effectively. APTA believes that it is not inappropriate for licensed physical therapists to perform dry needling so long as they have education and training in the performance of dry needling, and are competent in the use of the intervention.

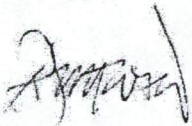
I understand that there is some questions related the possible overlap of this modality with those techniques used in the practice of acupuncture. Dry needling by physical therapists is a manual therapy intervention that involves the use of needles. The utilization of needles (a tool) is the primary similarity between dry needling and acupuncture. Most professions today share some procedures, tools, or interventions with other regulated professions. It is unreasonable to expect one

profession to have exclusive domain over an intervention, tool, or modality. Most state laws governing the licensure of health care professions provide exemptions for other regulated health providers who are acting within their scope of practice, so long as providers do not refer to their services as anything but the profession for which they are regulated.

In addition there are differences in the philosophy, rationale, and use in treatment of dry needling by physical therapists versus acupuncturists. According to the American College of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, the Master of Acupuncture & Oriental Medicine degree program is based on preserving the *ancient theories, principles and tenets of traditional Chinese medicine*. The objectives and philosophy behind the use of dry needling by physical therapists is not based on ancient theories or tenets of traditional Chinese medicine. The performance of modern dry needling by physical therapists is based on western neuroanatomy and modern scientific study of the musculoskeletal and nervous system.

I hope this information is helpful. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Scott Ward". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font.

R. Scott Ward, PT, PhD  
President, American Physical Therapy Association

APTA/state/jle