

Kentucky the 41st State to Legalize Acupuncture

On April 10, 2006 the Kentucky Legislature passed HB 17 (95-0) creating Acupuncture Certification. The Governor signed the bill into law on April 24, 2006.

Interviewer: Deborah Lincoln, RN, MSN, RAc, DiplAc, AAOM Vice President of Corp. Events (DL)

Interviewee: Mimi Taiger, DiplAc (MT)

HB 17 - Background and History

DL: Can you explain how this bill developed?

MT: The original bill was the brainchild of an anonymous benefactor who had a vision for a holistic health center. She had formed a holistic health center with other complementary medicine providers and saw acupuncture as a natural choice for inclusion. The first version of this legislation was achieved through the collaboration of a few acupuncturists that drafted an all-inclusive practice act with the leadership of Betsy Whitmer, LAc. Unfortunately, this bill was opposed by the Kentucky State Medical and Chiropractic Boards, and failed in the 11th hour. The bill lay dormant over the next five years, due to a lack of financial backing and political sponsorship.

DL: How did you resurrect the bill from its dormant status?

MT: I contacted the originators of the bill and decided to reinstate our efforts under the leadership of Betsy Whitmer and Shelly Ochs, a resident acupuncturist in Kentucky. Our joint efforts resulted in a bill that was simple, straightforward and free of some of the entanglements that prevented its earlier passage. We attempted to establish licensure, but were only successful in negotiating to certification.

DL: Who were the main supporters of the second incarnation of this bill?

MT: We were fortunate to receive the pro bono services of Oliver Barber, Esq., who lobbied extensively on our behalf.

Representative Denver Butler and Senator Julie Rose-Denton gave the bill its momentum, and are largely responsible for its success.

DL: How helpful were other acupuncturists in the state?

MT: We were forced to rely on states with larger associations to fund our efforts. Eventually, we were able to grow our state association to include 18 members, which gave us a significant boost.

DL: What was the state law prior to the passage of the bill?

MT: Only Western Medical Doctors could practice acupuncture. Kentucky had an unusual situation in that many of the acupuncturists who lived here were forced to practice in nearby states. I am so grateful that this law secures the safety of both the public and acupuncture practitioners.

DL: Can chiropractors and naturopaths practice in Kentucky?

MT: No.

DL: What were the biggest obstacles that you faced?

MT: The chiropractors, the Kentucky State Medical Board and a sole chiropractor who wanted to be grandfathered in with limited training.

DL: How did you address this?

MT: Betsy Smith, Associate Deputy Director of the NCCAOM, was instrumental in convincing legislators not to support the portion of the bill that would have dramatically reduced the training required to become a certified acupuncturist in the state. Due to her testimony during the House hearing, legislators agreed to remove the language which would have allowed anyone who passed the NCCAOM exam to be grandfathered in.

DL: What was the final vote in the House and Senate?

MT: It was unanimous in both the House and Senate.

DL: Will Kentucky implement a statewide Board of Acupuncture; if so, what standards will be mandated?

MT: Kentucky will establish an Acupuncture Council under the State Medical Board. Acupuncturists will be required to obtain NCCAOM certification and consumers will not be required to obtain a PCP referral to begin services in the state.

DL: What's next for the state's acupuncturists?

MT: The next step is to grow our membership to support our professional growth in the state, which includes our on-going need for lobby support. We need financial assistance to retain the Lobbyist as we have much work to do and only a few practitioners to support our monetary needs.

I would like to express my gratitude to the following people, without whose efforts this bill would not have been successful: Shelly Ochs, DiplAc NCCAOM; Betsy Whitmer, DipAc NCCAOM; Mr. Oliver Barber, Attorney/lobbyist; Betsy Smith, Associate Deputy Director of the NCCAOM; Representative Denver Butler (D-Kentucky), Senator Julie Rose-Denton (R-Kentucky).

DL: "BREAKING NEWS FROM KENTUCKY"

Just one hour before my interview with Mimi Taiger, she was hired as the first NCCAOM certified acupuncturist in the State of Kentucky, by St Elizabeth Hospital in Edward, Kentucky. She was asked to join the Hospital's Holistic Health Department. This only became possible due to the passage of HB 17. Currently the hospital has one MD on staff practicing Acupuncture one day a week.

GREAT JOB AND THANK YOU MIMI TAEGER AND HER FABULOUS TEAM FOR MAKING A DREAM A REALITY!



Mimi Taiger, DiplAc