



COMDTINST 6320.4
21 SEPTEMBER 2017

COMMANDANT INSTRUCTION 6320.4

Subj: AURICULAR ACUPUNCTURE

Ref: (a) Coast Guard Medical Manual, COMDTINST M6000.1 (series)
(b) World Health Organization: Guidelines on Basic Training and Safety in Acupuncture, 1999

1. PURPOSE. To establish policy for training, privileging, and clinical practice of auricular acupuncture.
2. ACTION. All Coast Guard unit commanders, commanding officers, officer-in-charge, deputy/assistant commandants, and chiefs of headquarters staff elements must comply with the provisions of this Instruction. Internet release is authorized.
3. DIRECTIVES AFFECTED. None.
4. BACKGROUND. Pain is the most common diagnosis seen in outpatients in the United States. Medical care for the 50 million patients in the United States with chronic pain, and secondary disability, cost the national economy approximately \$100 billion annually. Auricular acupuncture, also known as “Battlefield Acupuncture” is an effective treatment for acute and chronic pain.
5. DISCLAIMER. This guidance is not a substitute for applicable legal requirements, nor is it itself a rule. It is intended to provide operational guidance for Coast Guard personnel and is not intended to nor does it impose legally-binding requirements on any party outside the Coast Guard.
6. IMPACT ASSESSMENT.
 - a. PERSONNEL RESOURCES REQUIRED. Medical Officers with supplemental privileges for auricular acupuncture shall perform tasks associated with this Instruction.
 - b. TRAINING REQUIRED. See Paragraph 13 of this Instruction.

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NON-STANDARD DISTRIBUTION:

- c. FUNDING. Healthcare providers are responsible for any associated training costs.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECT AND IMPACT CONSIDERATIONS.

- a. The development of this Instruction and the general policies contained within it have been thoroughly reviewed by the originating office in conjunction with the Office of Environmental Management, and are categorically excluded (CE) under current USCG CE #33 from further environmental analysis, in accordance with Section 2.B.2 and Figure 2-1 of the National Environmental Policy Act Implementing Procedures and Policy for Considering Environmental Impacts, COMDTINST M16475.1 (series).
- b. This Instruction will not have any of the following: significant cumulative impacts on the human environment; substantial controversy or substantial change to existing environmental conditions; or inconsistencies with any Federal, State, or local laws or administrative determinations relating to the environment. All future specific actions resulting from the general policies in this Instruction must be individually evaluated for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), DHS and USCG NEPA policy, and compliance with all other environmental mandates.

8. DISTRIBUTION. No paper distribution will be made of this Instruction. An electronic version will be located on the following Commandant (CG-612) web sites. Internet: <http://www.dcms.uscg.mil/Our-Organization/Assistant-Commandant-for-C4IT-CG-6-/The-Office-of-Information-Management-CG-61/aboutCGDS/>, and CGPortal: <https://cgportal2.uscg.mil/library/directives/SitePages/Home.aspx>.

10. RECORDS MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS. This Instruction has been thoroughly reviewed during the directives clearance process, and it has been determined there are no further records scheduling requirements, in accordance with Federal Records Act, 44 U.S.C. 3101 et seq., National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) requirements, and the Information and Life Cycle Management Manual, COMDTINST M5212.12 (series). This policy does not have any significant or substantial change to existing records management requirements.

11. DEFINITIONS.

- a. Acupuncture. Acupuncture is a technique which employs needles to stimulate specified points on the body to alleviate pain as well as other medical conditions. There are more than 350 acupuncture points on the body. Stimulation of acupuncture points is most often achieved by using very thin solid metal needles to pierce the skin overlying the acupuncture points.
- b. Auricular Acupuncture. Auricular acupuncture refers to the stimulation of one to five points on the external ear. It is used to treat acute and chronic pain from any cause.

12. RESPONSIBILITIES.

- a. Director of Health, Safety and Work-Life (CG-11). Ensure that the Coast Guard Professional Review Committee (PRC) provides oversight for auricular acupuncture privileging requirements.
- b. Healthcare Providers Privileged in Auricular Acupuncture.
 - (1) Perform auricular acupuncture procedures on patients only for clinical indications approved in this Instruction.
 - (2) Inform the patient of potential complications and ensure that a signed informed consent form is placed within the patient's Service Treatment Record at the time of each treatment.
 - (3) Provide patients with aftercare instructions following the procedure (see Enclosure 1 of this Instruction).

13. TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION.

- a. Training for the auricular acupuncture technique is typically conducted over a 4-hour period of time at the Air Force Acupuncture Center (Joint Base Andrews, MD) and several other Department of Defense (DoD) locations.
- b. Healthcare providers requesting supplemental privileges for auricular acupuncture shall complete training in Battlefield Acupuncture at the Air Force Acupuncture Center at Joint Base Andrews, MD or at other DoD auricular acupuncture training sites which provide comparable "hands-on" experience with pain clinic patients.

14. PRIVILEGING.

- a. Only Coast Guard Medical Officers as defined in Reference (a) and equivalent Coast Guard contract healthcare providers may request supplemental clinical privileges for auricular acupuncture.
- b. To obtain supplemental privileges in the auricular acupuncture technique, healthcare providers must provide documentation of a one-time successful completion of an acceptable auricular acupuncture course to the Credentials Verification Organization.
- c. The supplemental privileges for auricular acupuncture must be supported by the clinical setting where the healthcare provider is currently assigned.
- d. The duration of the supplemental clinical privilege will conform to requirements as per Reference (a).

15. CLINICAL INDICATIONS. Auricular acupuncture is authorized only for acute or chronic pain.

16. CLINICAL CONTRAINDICATIONS.

- a. Per Reference (b), acupuncture is generally a safe procedure with few contraindications or complications. Nevertheless, with auricular acupuncture there is always a potential risk, however slight, of transmitting infection from healthcare provider to patient or from patient to healthcare provider, or of introducing pathogenic organisms that can result in infection. Safety in acupuncture therefore requires constant vigilance in maintaining high standards of cleanliness and use of single use or sterilized needles.
- b. Avoidance of infection in auricular acupuncture requires close adherence to appropriate cleanliness standards. At a minimum, healthcare providers will wash their hands with antimicrobial soap and water prior to the procedure and clean the patient's ear with an alcohol wipe. Auricular acupuncture will not be performed on immunocompromised patients or if there is an active infection involving the ear.
- c. Contraindications to auricular acupuncture include patient refusal, infection or malignant tumor at the site of needle placement, current immunocompromised status, and current severe bleeding disorders such as severe thrombocytopenia. As a general precaution, auricular acupuncture should not be performed on pregnant patients or patients who are suspected of being pregnant.
- d. Potential accidents and adverse reactions associated with auricular acupuncture include fainting, convulsions, pain, broken needles, and local infection. If lightheadedness occurs, the patient will be asked to lie down until the symptoms resolve, the needles will be removed and the treatment stopped. Patients who experience euphoria will be asked to remain in the clinic until this stabilizes or resolves and will be advised not to drive or use machinery until the sensation has fully resolved. Patients should avoid alcohol and sex during the six hours before and after the treatment. Duty restrictions apply to aviation and dive personnel who shall be grounded while acupuncture needles are in place and for the first treatment for 4 hours after the acupuncture needles fall out or are removed. Duty restrictions for the underlying medical condition among aviation and dive personnel shall be considered separately.

17. CLINICAL SUPPLIES.

- a. Single-use gold acupuncture needles will be used to minimize the risk of infection and to avoid nickel sensitization from stainless steel acupuncture needles.
- b. Each needle should be visually checked before use to determine whether it is bent or in any way defective. Needles found to be bent or otherwise defective will not be used for treatment and instead will be disposed of in a "sharps" container.

18. INFORMED CONSENT. Auricular acupuncture providers must fully counsel patients on the risks and benefits of the procedure prior to each treatment. The Optional Form 522, Request for Administration of Anesthesia and for Performance of Operations and Other Procedures, shall be used to document this counseling, refer to Enclosure 2.
19. AFTERCARE INSTRUCTIONS. Auricular acupuncture treatment aftercare instructions will be provided to patients, refer to Enclosure 1.
20. FORMS/REPORTS. The form referenced in this Instruction is available on the Standard Workstation or on the Internet: <http://www.uscg.mil/forms/>; CG Portal <https://cgportal2.uscg.mil/library/forms/SitePages/Home.aspx>.
21. REQUESTS FOR CHANGES. Submit change requests to COMDT (CG-1121) Publications and Directives.

E. G. Schwartz /s/
Rear Admiral, U.S. Public Health Service
Director of Health, Safety, and Work-Life

Encl: (1) Auricular Acupuncture Patient Aftercare Instruction
(2) Informed Consent

AURICULAR ACUPUNCTURE PATIENT AFTERCARE INSTRUCTION

- Activity:** You should have a relatively easy day today if possible. Avoid strenuous exercise, heavy house work, or heavy yard work. Avoid alcohol and sex for a minimum of six hours after the treatment. Eat a healthy and moderate diet today. Following these instructions on the day of your next auricular acupuncture treatment may enhance the effectiveness of the treatment. You may return to your normal activity on the day following treatment.
- Needles:** The needles will fall out in two to four days. They may be uncomfortable when you sleep or brush something (the telephone for example) over them. If the discomfort is causing distress, you may remove them with tweezers or your fingernails before they fall out on their own. Once the needles are out, dispose of them in a container with a lid.
- Inflammation:** Signs of inflammation include redness, warmth, swelling, or increasing pain at a needle site. If you suspect inflammation, remove all of the needles right away and arrange follow-up with your auricular acupuncture provider.
- Medications:** Continue your prescription medications as directed by your regular provider. If your provider permits, you might consider not taking pain medication on the day of your next treatment in order to better assess the pain relief provided by auricular acupuncture.
- Treatment Results:** Take written notes of your response to the treatment, and bring them with you to your follow-up visit. Include the status of your pain, changes in depth/pattern of sleep, energy levels, and feelings of well being. Your auricular acupuncture provider will use these notes to optimize your ongoing care.

INFORMED CONSENT

Use Optional Form 522, Request for Administration of Anesthesia and for Performance of Operations and Other Procedures

Block 1a: Check the “Anesthesia” block

Block 1b: Enter “Acupuncture”

Block 2: Enter “Insertion of sterile semi-permanent acupuncture needles into the skin at any of five distinct points on the surface of the ear. Risks are uncommon, but may include discomfort or pain at the needled sites, bleeding or bruising, inflammation and infection, broken needles, feeling dizzy or nauseated, fainting, and feeling euphoric or light-headed after treatment. Drowsiness can rarely occur. I have been counseled not to drive if I experience light-headedness, fainting, or any drowsiness. Existing symptoms can get worse after treatment, but this nearly always is temporary and is a sign that the body is responding to the treatment. If several auricular treatments are performed, temporary discoloration may occur on the treated area of the ear. Other very rare complications may also occur. I certify that I am not pregnant. If I become pregnant, or have reason to believe that I am pregnant during the course of treatment, I will notify my auricular acupuncture provider before receiving further acupuncture treatments.”