

Complementary and Alternative Medicine and Therapies

Includes:

- Acupuncturist
- Chiropractic
- Massage Therapist

Definition of Complementary and Alternative Medicine

The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), a component of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), is the federal government's lead agency for scientific research on complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). NCCAM's mission is to explore CAM healing practices in the context of rigorous science, train CAM researchers, and disseminate authoritative information to the public and professionals.

CAM is defined by the NCCAM as "a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products that are not presently considered to be part of conventional medicine. Complementary medicine is used together with conventional medicine, and alternative medicine is used in place of conventional medicine." The NCCAM also notes that "the list of what is considered to be CAM changes continually, as those therapies that are proven to be safe and effective become adopted into conventional health care and as new approaches to health care emerge."

NCCAM groups CAM practices into the following domains:

- Whole medical systems, which are built upon complete systems of theory and practice. Examples include homeopathic medicine, and naturopathic medicine, traditional Chinese medicine, and Ayurveda.
- Mind-body medicine, which uses a variety of techniques to enhance the mind's capacity to affect bodily function and symptoms. Examples include meditation, prayer, mental healing, and therapies drawing on the creative arts, such as art, dance, or music. (**Note:** Art, dance, and music therapy programs are listed in the "Expressive/Creative Arts Therapies" section).
- Biologically based practices, which encompasses use of substances found in nature, such as herbs, foods, and vitamins. Some examples include dietary supplements, herbal products, and the use of other so-called natural but as yet scientifically unproven therapies.
- Manipulative and body-based practices are based on manipulation and/or movement of one or more parts of the body. Examples include chiropractic or osteopathic manipulation and massage.
- Energy medicine, which involves use of energy fields, is of two types. Biofield therapies are intended to affect energy fields that purportedly surround and penetrate the human body; examples include qi gong, Reiki, and Therapeutic Touch; bioelectromagnetic-based therapies involve the unconventional use of electromagnetic fields, such as pulsed fields, magnetic fields, or alternating-current or direct-current fields.

Note: The following information on health care careers in CAM is solely for information purposes and may not be construed as an acknowledgment of the therapeutic value or endorsement of these professions/organizations by the AMA. For the purposes of this *Directory*, the AMA is relying on the NCCAM's definition of CAM as authoritative.

Acupuncturist



Career Description

The practice of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (AOM) is an ancient and empirical system based on the concept of *Qi* (pronounced "chee"), which is usually translated as energy. Acupuncturists, also known as Oriental Medicine Practitioners, assess a patient's syndrome or pattern of disharmony by using questioning, palpitation, visual inspection, and olfactory-auditory data collection. An acupuncturist then determines the treatment principle and strategy to prompt the patient back to functional harmony. This approach is based on a conceptual framework that is unlike conventional modern medicine. The particular intervention is chosen from among several traditional methods. These interventions include acupuncture, electro-acupuncture, cupping, manual therapies such as acupressure and moxibustion, and exercises such as *tai chi* or *qi gong*, as well as Chinese herbal preparations and dietary therapy.



Employment Characteristics

Acupuncturists may be employed in a wide variety of health care workplaces such as community clinics, integrative practices, hospitals, disaster-relief teams, and/or private practice. Acupuncturists work an average 35-40 hours per week. Independent practitioners may set their own hours

and may work evenings/weekends to accommodate patients. Practitioners in private practice also have the business responsibilities of running a practice. In a large practice, acupuncturists may employ office managers/assistants. Currently, more than 90% of licensed acupuncturists work as solo practitioners.



Salary

Salaries vary widely, depending on the type of practice (solo practitioner or employed in a clinic or hospital). A 2008 study by the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM) found that certified acupuncturists and Oriental medicine practitioners earned on average \$60,000 per year.



Educational Programs

Currently, there are 63 programs of acupuncture or Oriental medicine accredited by the Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (ACAOM) and an additional seven programs with candidacy status. ACAOM is recognized by the US Department of Education (USDE) as an authority in assessing master's degree and master's level certificate and diploma programs in acupuncture and Oriental medicine.

Length. Acupuncture and Oriental medicine programs are typically three to four academic years (90 to 120 instructional weeks), consisting of a minimum of 105 semester credits (1,905 hours) for an acupuncture program and 146 semester credits (2,625 hours) for an Oriental medicine program.

Prerequisites. Satisfactory completion of at least two academic years (60 semester credits/90 quarter credits) of education at the baccalaureate level that is appropriate preparation for graduate level work, or the equivalent, from an institution accredited by an agency recognized by the US Secretary of Education.

Curriculum.

Acupuncture:

- 47 semester credits (705 hours) in Oriental medical theory, diagnosis and treatment techniques in acupuncture and related studies
- 22 semester credits (660 hours) in clinical training
- 30 semester credits (450 hours) in biomedical clinical sciences
- 6 semester credits (90 hours) in counseling, communication, ethics, and practice management

Oriental Medicine:

- 47 semester credits (705 hours) in Oriental medical theory, diagnosis and treatment techniques in acupuncture, and related studies
- 30 semester credits (450 hours) in didactic Oriental herbal studies
- 29 semester credits (870 hours) in integrated acupuncture and herbal clinical training
- 34 semester credits (510 hours) in biomedical clinical sciences
- 6 semester credits (90 hours) in counseling, communication, ethics, and practice management



Licensure/Certification/Registration

Forty-three states and the District of Columbia either license, certify, or register comprehensively trained non-physician practitioners, thus statutorily recognizing the practice of acupuncture. In most states where statutory regulation exists, acupuncturists have independent status as practitioners, although there are a few states where practitioners must have supervision, prior referral, or initial diagnosis by a medical doctor. The administrative structure for regulating the profession in the states varies, with a number of states having an independent board composed of acupuncturists or a state medical board assisted by an acupuncture advisory board or committee. Other administrative arrangements may include regulation of the profession by a joint board composed of various conventional and complementary and alternative health care professions, regulation by another profession, or by a larger administrative division within a state department or agency, usually with the assistance of an acupuncture advisory body.

Certification by the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM) is the only nationally recognized certification available to qualified practitioners of acupuncture and Oriental medicine. Candidates who pass the examination are awarded the Dipl Ac (NCCAOM) (Diplomate in Acupuncture) designation. NCCAOM certification is a requirement for

licensure in most states. Many third-party payers recognize NCCAOM certification as a criterion for reimbursement, and employers may require NCCAOM certification as a condition for hiring or promotion.



Inquiries

Careers

American Association of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine

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Sacramento, CA 95816
(866) 455-7999 or (916) 443-4770
E-mail: info@aaaomonline.org
www.aaaomonline.org

Council of Colleges of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine
3909 National Drive, Suite 125
Burtonsville, MD 20866
(301) 476-7791
E-mail: executivedirector@ccaom.org
www.ccaom.org

Licensure/Certification/Registration

National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine

76 South Laura Street, Suite 1290
Jacksonville, FL 32202
(904) 598-1005
E-mail: kwardcook@nccaom.org
www.nccaom.org

Federation of Acupuncture & Oriental Medicine Regulatory Agencies

Maryland Board of Acupuncture
4201 Patterson Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21215
(410) 764-4766
E-mail: contact@faomra.com
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Program Accreditation

Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine
Maryland Trade Center #3
7501 Greenway Center Drive, Suite 760
Greenbelt, MD 20770
(301) 313-0855
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Research

Society for Acupuncture Research
PO Box 33015
Portland, OR 97292
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