

What is the Academic Consortium for Complementary and Alternative Health Care (ACCAHC)?

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INTRODUCTION

The Academic Consortium for Complementary and Alternative Health Care (ACCAHC) is a multi-disciplinary, collaborative not-for-profit charitable organization created to improve patient care. This mission is accomplished through fostering mutual respect and understanding between various disciplines and emerging fields, mainly through interprofessional education, engagement in key policy initiatives, and the promotion of whole-person research. There are five core disciplines involved in ACCAHC (acupuncture and Oriental medicine, chiropractic, direct-entry midwifery, naturopathic medicine, and massage therapy), and three emerging fields (Ayurveda, homeopathy, and Yoga therapy). Membership seats are held by the council of colleges, plus the accrediting and certifying agencies of these disciplines. Other members are emerging CAM professions who are striving to meet regulatory standards in the United States.

Why Is ACCAHC Necessary?

The structure of health care in the United States is changing. Based on recent statistics, four out of ten Americans utilized some form of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) within the past 12 months⁽¹⁾. According to the Bravewell Collaborative⁽²⁾, “Over the past two decades, there has been documented growth in the number of clinical centers providing integrative medicine, the number of medical schools teaching integrative strategies, the number of researchers studying integrative interventions, and the number of patients seeking integrative care.” With such extensive growth, integration of CAM and conventional health care is imperative. ACCAHC is an organization dedicated to the optimal integration of CAM practitioners and professions into mainstream medicine. Such collaboration among the CAM disciplines and emerging fields strengthens and unifies this effort.

How Did ACCAHC Start?

A small group of conventional medical doctors practicing integrative medicine came together in

1999 and incorporated the Consortium of Academic Health Centers for Integrative Medicine as a non-profit in 2002. “The Consortium” is comprised of 51 academic health centers and affiliate institutions from across the United States and Canada. In 2004, the Integrated Healthcare Policy Consortium (IHPC), which is a multidisciplinary organization that focuses on policies to advance integrative health care, created ACCAHC as an educational initiative to interact and collaborate with organizations like the Consortium. This initiative was also envisioned to bring together the CAM professions to unify efforts toward the same goals. IHPC created, and ACCAHC was instrumental in the organization of, the 2005 National Education Dialogue to Advance Integrated Health Care (NED). This meeting of CAM and integrative medicine educators at Georgetown University had the goal of clarifying the shared educational opportunities and challenges faced in the emerging context of integrative medicine and integrative health.

In 2006, there was a joint meeting of the executive teams of the Consortium and ACCAHC in Edmonton, Canada to continue the dialogue regarding the most effective ways to incorporate information on CAM professions into conventional medical curricula, and to discuss how CAM schools could incorporate curricular changes to facilitate optimal integration. These two organizations continue to work closely together for the good of patient-centered health care and health care education. Shortly after that meeting, the decision was made to incorporate ACCAHC; and in early 2008 ACCAHC became a 501c3 (not-for-profit organization), independent of IHPC.

Goals of ACCAHC

ACCAHC’s overarching focus is on quality health care for the public. This organization believes that the foundation for quality clinical practice includes excellence in research, clinical practice, and integration of educational processes among the ACCAHC disciplines and conventional medical disciplines, a process that should foster mutual respect. The work of ACCAHC is done through its Board of Directors, Executive Committee, and three working groups: the

Education Working Group (EWG), the Clinical Care Working Group (CWG), and the Research Working Group (RWG).

As outlined on ACCAHC's website, the current key areas of involvement include:

- Managing the publication and marketing of the ACCAHC *Clinicians' and Educators' Desk Reference on the Licensed Complementary and Alternative Healthcare Professions (CEDR)*.
- Establishing and promoting ACCAHC's *Competencies for Optimal Practice in Integrated Environments*.
- Assisting the NIH National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) to better understand the distinct challenges and opportunities in research relative to the ACCAHC disciplines.
- Engaging national interprofessional education and care (IPE/C) endeavors through such steps as sponsorship of the conference "Collaborating Across Borders III" in Tucson, Arizona, in November 2011 where 640 copies of the CEDR were presented to attendees. This conference was considered the most influential North American IPE/C conference.
- Developing and organizing the clearinghouse web portal, called the Center for Optimal Integration, that includes up-to-date information on various CAM therapies.
- Representing patient interest in the ACCAHC disciplines and integrative practices in the statute of Medicine's Global Forum on Innovation in Health Professional Education.

How Is the Massage Therapy Profession Represented?

Massage therapists are the most commonly used CAM practitioners in conventional medicine settings⁽²⁾. Because the massage field has a US Department of Education-recognized accrediting agency, massage therapy is included as one of ACCAHC's five core CAM disciplines. Each committee within ACCAHC has at least one representative from massage therapy. Therefore, massage therapy is well-represented during interprofessional discussions, an important factor in continual integrative efforts. When ACCAHC is asked to participate with other organizations, such as The Consortium, a massage therapist is frequently involved, as well. However, in these environments, some consider massage therapy a separate discipline within CAM, whereas others consider it a CAM modality within other disciplines, such as within naturopathy or nursing. There is no denying that massage has a place in the health care field, although questions persist: Are we respected as a profession? Do we have the credentials to be an equal part of the interdisciplinary team? How should

we define ourselves to the larger health care field and for what conditions? Do we have the research to support our practice for such conditions?

These are challenging questions that do not yet have complete answers. Our profession needs to continue focusing on development of a universally-recognized definition and scope of practice, as well as consistent education requirements and credentialing. Except in unlicensed states, the National Certification designation has not served the massage therapy profession as well as some anticipated. In 2013, National Certification will be amended to Board Certification, requiring more education hours than the usual massage education, and also requiring a certain amount of hands-on time with clients. Having consistent and ongoing credentialing will give therapists more credibility, and will allow for more consistency in how our profession is defined. However, we need to continue along this path in an effort to unify and strengthen our position within the interprofessional collaborative efforts and to maintain our position in integrative medicine.

How Can Massage Therapists Get Involved?

Currently ACCAHC has a member category called Associates at a cost of \$250 per year. Associates are primarily associations and like-minded businesses. ACCAHC is currently creating another means for individuals, educators, students, and clinicians to be connected to and participate in this work. People who are interested can send their email address to Renée Motheral Clugston at rclugston@accahc.org to receive more information when it becomes available.

CONCLUSION

ACCAHC is an organization that is dedicated to quality patient/client care through improved collaborative efforts in education, clinical practice, and research. As a major part of ACCAHC, the massage therapy profession will continue to be included in discussions regarding allopathic medical education, other CAM education, health care policies on integration, and research collaboration. For more information on ACCAHC, please visit the following website: www.accahc.org.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST NOTIFICATION

The authors declare there are no conflicts of interest.

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