

Acupuncture and moxibustion medical system in Japan

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When examined historically, the beginning of the acupuncturist goes back to the time of "Ishitsuryo" in Taiho Ritsuryo Legal Code (701 A.D.). At that time, training of acupuncturists was performed according to the medical educational system, but it was terminated with the repeal of Ishitsuryo. Thereafter acupuncturist training was performed by an apprentice system similar to that for practitioners of traditional Chinese (Kampo) medicine.

In the Meiji period, laws concerning acupuncturists and moxibustionists were finally established. The first regulation was of a system in which acupuncture and moxibustion treatments were given under the supervision of physicians. However, this law was never implemented, and in its place an acupuncture and moxibustion medical system using business licenses was widely imposed. In this way, an attempt was made to place acupuncture and moxibustion treatments within the medical care system, but it was ultimately placed outside of the medical care system of Western medicine.

The acupuncture and moxibustion treatment system under business licenses changed to one under status licenses under the new constitution after World War II, but the system was not incorporated into the medical care system even under the new constitution. Thereafter laws were revised many times, but the system has not been changed to this day. Therefore, performance of acupuncture and moxibustion treatments are still prohibited in medical institutions, and as a general rule, insurance does not cover such treatments except in special cases. Under existing laws, patients are responsible for their own expenses related to acupuncture and moxibustion treatments, and the treatments are generally performed at practitioners' clinics.

Globally, acupuncture and moxibustion treatments have been adopted actively at the forefront of healthcare settings, and they are developing as complementary treatments which play roles as important medical care. In the neighboring countries of China and South Korea, traditional medicine is treated as Chinese medicine and Korean medicine in the same way as Western medicine. These countries train Chinese physicians and Korean physicians who specialize in traditional medicine. The U.S. has a system in which acupuncture and moxibustion can be practiced together with traditional Chinese herbal medicine, although there are differences among states.

When the acupuncture and moxibustion medical system is compared between Japan and foreign countries, the uniqueness of the system in Japan becomes apparent. However, the framework of the entire medical care has been reviewed from the perspective of factors such as changes in disease structure, increases in medical expenses, and the quality of medical treatment. Acupuncture and moxibustion treatments seem to have reached a point in which their greater acceptance is expected.