

Arya Nielsen, PhD



Changing the culture of medicine through research, policy and dissemination

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Dr. Nielsen is a pioneer in the field of Acupuncture and East Asian Medicine in the U.S. Her creativity, scholarship and leadership have had far-reaching impact on its integration throughout the healthcare system.

As an educator, Dr. Nielsen expanded the practice of acupuncture therapy in the academic medical setting. In 2015 she created the first hospital-based acupuncture fellowship program for licensed acupuncturists at Mount Sinai Beth Israel (MSBI), combining an academic program with integration of advanced practitioners into their clinical departments.

On a policy level, Dr. Nielsen brings a rigorous perspective that has broadened acupuncture's role in medicine. In 2013 she petitioned The Joint Commission (TJC) to review their policy on the use of nonpharmacological treatments for pain management in hospitals they accredit. She served on the Joint Commission Stakeholder Panel on pain and submitted a comprehensive research review on acupuncture therapy for cancer pain, chronic pain, and its opioid sparing capabilities in acute pain. In 2015 TJC required hospitals to promote access to nonpharm therapies as options for the treatment of pain, and made it a "scorable"

mandate. As of Jan 1, 2018 hospitals are required to provide evidence-based nonpharm therapies for pain or refer patients at discharge if the therapy is not readily available at the hospital. This has expanded the types of treatments patients can increasingly expect to receive for pain and helped lower opioid pain management.

Dr. Nielsen is the current Chair of the Policy Working Group for the Academic Consortium for Integrative Medicine & Health (ACIMH), the 75-member organization of North American academic medical centers, nursing schools and health systems. In 2019 she co-authored the ACIMH's commentary on the HHS draft report on Pain Management Best Practices, a thorough review with highly informed, evidence-based recommendations.

As a researcher Dr. Nielsen has worked to further the understanding of the physiology and therapeutic effect of gua sha (a traditional East Asian healing method), the use of acupuncture therapies for inpatient and hospital-based care, and the treatment of chronic pain in underserved populations. She has been at the forefront of how best to utilize acupuncture in terms of effectiveness, cost, safety and availability.

She is working with outstanding academic colleagues on projects funded by the Bravewell Collaborative and the NIH HEAL initiative. Her research has studied patient acceptance and effectiveness of group acupuncture visits; use of acupuncture therapy for acute pain in the ER; its role in pain management to help reduce opioid use and misuse; and its effectiveness for chronic low back pain in older adults (which is now covered by Medicare).

Dr. Nielsen practiced acupuncture and East Asian Medicine for many years, teaches internationally, and has published the definitive text on gua sha in the U.S.