

Joe Black, PT—Tennessee Physical Therapy Association

About 4 years ago we had addressed the Dry Needling issue in Tennessee and after discussions with the Tennessee Physical Therapy Licensing Board, we agreed that it was not prudent to pursue a legislative change and to let the Licensing Board promulgate rules that would regulate dry needling.

Unfortunately, in June of 2014, the Attorney General for Tennessee issued a ruling that declared that dry needling was outside the scope of practice for physical therapy.

It became necessary to pursue a legislative agenda to change the practice act and allow dry needling. Despite our members doing dry needling who were quite anxious to restore that part of their practice, we knew it would be a long haul.

Bills had to be written, sponsors had to be found, and the bills had to be introduced in both the House and the Senate. Then came a spate of hearings and many, many meetings with individual legislators, explaining our bill and helping them to understand why this should be part of physical therapy practice.

There was some opposition from the accupuncturists but they were ill prepared and politically ineffective. TPTA, on the other hand, was the seasoned pro in this situation and our bills passed all committees unanimously and then got unanimous votes in both the House and Senate.

But lest you think it ends there, it doesn't. It had to get the Governor's signature, go back to the Licensing Board to promulgate more rules, and had to sit on the Attorney General's desk for 90 days. So finally, on July 1, 2016, physical therapists in Tennessee could perform dry needling. Over two long years but victory was hours.

And the best thing (maybe)? The language in our practice act is outstanding with regards to dry needling--so much so that states all across the country are using it and our arguments in their own efforts.

I can't say too much about the help and support we got from APTA. Michael Matlack in particular was a hero in all his efforts on our behalf. Of course Justin Elliott has always been there.