

The History of the NADA 5-point Acupuncture Protocol

By [Tom Warburton](#) 8th October 2019 [Featured](#)
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The National Acupuncture Detoxification Association (NADA) is a not-for-profit training and advocacy organisation, encouraging community wellness through the use of a standardised auricular acupuncture protocol for behavioural health, including addictions, mental health and emotional trauma. We work to improve access and effectiveness of care through promoting policies and practice which integrate the NADA protocol with other western behavioural health modalities.

History of NADA



The use of acupuncture is a major component of the ancient traditional art of Chinese medicine. Chinese cultures have placed needles into precise locations on the body to relieve pain and treat disease for over 2000 years. Acupuncture for the treatment of addiction is a recent development in the history of this ancient art.

In 1973 a Chinese doctor, Dr H L Wen, a neurosurgeon working in Kwong Wah Hospital in Hong Kong was the first to report successful treatment of withdrawal symptoms and cravings of addiction with acupuncture. Dr Wen observed that opiate users who had undergone surgery and received acupuncture for post-operative pain relief experienced

fewer withdrawal symptoms and cravings. He subsequently conducted clinical studies that established acupuncture as a valuable treatment for other forms of addiction, and published his findings in the "Asian Journal of Acupuncture".

Meanwhile, over in mid-seventies USA, the New York Bronx had a growing epidemic of drug addiction and, in response to local outrage, the Lincoln Recovery Centre emerged. Initially, the Lincoln was a methadone prescribing program but many of the staff had concerns about the use of addictive drugs to treat substance abuse. Staff became interested in the acupuncture treatment method after learning of Dr Wen's success with heroin addiction, and the addition of acupuncture for detox to the recovery program began in the late 1970s.

The staff, who donated their own time to this pioneering project, sought acupuncturists that would be willing to attend the Lincoln to demonstrate acupuncture; they started with the protocol used at Kwong Wah Hospital, which was to needle the Lung point on the Ear and add electro-stimulation, with the effect lasting for around six hours.

Because of a problem of the electro-stimulator boxes constantly breaking, staff discovered, much to their surprise, that the non-electrical potentiated treatment (Inserting needles by hand) had a more prolonged effect.

This development led to affect the proliferation of NADA's acupuncture treatments. They found that using plain needling (Without Stimulation) was more effective, more flexible and less expensive, thus making the treatment more accessible. The practice was easier to learn and easily replicated.

Once the efficacy of acupuncture was firmly established, many of the Lincoln staff, including Dr Mike Smith (pictured below), went on to study acupuncture and, over time and with much experimentation of various ear and body points, the current NADA 5-point protocol was embraced.

The protocol involves the gentle placement of up to five small sterilised disposable needles into specific sites on each ear; no electrical stimulation is used. The recipients sit quietly in a groups setting for between 40–45 minutes, relaxing or meditating.

NADA Acudetox treatments have been shown to reduce the impact of withdrawal symptoms from alcohol, opiates, cocaine and amphetamines. It also diminishes the cravings associated with some of the most commonly abused substances, including nicotine and prescription medication.

Incorporated in 1985 in the state of New York, the **National Acupuncture Detoxification Association** (NADA US) was established by Dr Michael Smith, Director of the Lincoln Recovery Centre, along with other like-minded people. Their aim was to



**Dr Michael
Smith**

promote education and training of substance misuse counsellors in the NADA 5-point protocols.

Having determined the need to expand training capacity and awareness of auricular acupuncture as an effective tool for recovery, their work has gone on to help spread the use of standardised NADA acudetox protocols and practices both nationally and internationally.

NADA established membership enrolment, a collection of related reference materials, a codified training curriculum, and flexible systems for registering qualified trainers and methods for delivering training.

NADA has since trained thousands of health professionals, including counsellors, social workers, nurses, medical doctors, psychologists, acupuncturists, chiropractors, out-reach workers, drug court workers, corrections officers and many others, in the use the NADA 5-point Protocols.

Understanding the principles of both Chinese medicine and substance misuse is basic to NADA training and philosophy; the combined application of acupuncture alongside counselling and self-help groups enhances opportunities for success.

NADA in the UK

In 1991, the NADA 5-point Protocols were introduced and set-up in the UK by John Tindall at the Gateway Clinic, London. John began to train health workers in the field of addiction and mental health in the NADA 5-point Protocol, including to prison officers and NHS staff.

In the mid-1990s NADA UK was established, in 2005 NADA UK became a registered charity with its own board of trustees. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen problems with the board of trustees, in 2014, NADA UK had to take a different direction.

NADA was taken over by Steve Pinnington, who was for many years, a NADA trustee and integral part of the NADA UK board, as well as a NADA registered trainer. He was trained by John Tindall in the early 1990s and went on to study full body Acupuncture and Pharmacology at The Beijing University of Chinese Medicine, London.

In 1998, Steve Pinnington established NADA Acudetox Training Workshops as the major NADA training body for the UK. He also went on to introduce NADA Acudetox to Scotland and in 2014 established NADA Scotland. NADA Acudetox and NADA Scotland have now become the major training body in the UK for NADA Acudetox 5-Point Protocols training.

NADA Worldwide

NADA protocols are now used in over 40 countries around the world as a legitimate tool for addiction and associated mental health problems.

NADA 5-point Protocols are being used in many countries around the world:

Austria Denmark Greece India Foundation South Africa Norway Japan
Finland Germany Philippines Ireland Sweden Tunisia Bermuda Canada
Chile Bhutan Columbia Guatemala Croatia Scotland Greenland Haiti
USA Iran Singapore Italy Israel Russia Kenya Hungary Nepal Romania
Peru Thailand Trinidad & Tobago Uzbekistan Ecuador United Kingdom
Mexico Australia New Zealand Uganda

NADA Acudetox Protocols are also being used in some Asian countries to help people cope with the aftermath of natural disasters. NADA Acudetox Protocols were also used to treat New York Fire Fighters and Police Officers dealing with PTSD following the 9/11 attacks in the USA.

NADA Acudetox treatment programs are clinically effective, cost efficient, drug free and compatible across cultures. Acudetox is also, non-verbal, non-threatening, and a first stop intervention that has a calming effect on clients. As an initial form of substance

misuse therapy, it has been shown to improve clients' overall treatment response and retention in the program.

A 1999 CSAT-funded study showed that patients choosing outpatient programs with acupuncture were less likely to relapse in the 6 months following discharge.

(Shwartz et al. 1999)