

## Be Part of the Process, Not Part of the Problem

As the new millennium begins, our profession is faced with many opportunities and challenges. Acupuncture is experiencing a continually expanding scope of acceptance and popularity. More new patients are entering the offices of acupuncturists nationwide than ever before. More people are talking about acupuncture and wondering what it can do for them.

An incident at a party I attended this past holiday season is a good example. I was introduced to a husband and wife, both attorneys. In the course of our conversation, the subject of acupuncture entered the discussion. They were interested in acupuncture and asked if I thought it could help with their health problems. They had questions about the size of the needles used and whether or not acupuncture needles were reused on patients. Because of my involvement in the field, they asked me for a referral.

While the profession is expanding, serious challenges still face each practitioner. Only 38 states (and the District of Columbia) have laws and regulations favorable to Oriental medicine. This is a big election year in the U.S.; political offices at local, state and national levels will all be up for grabs.

Almost immediately, questions spring to mind. Who are the candidates and incumbents running for office? What are their feelings towards Oriental medicine? What is the political process, and how does it affect my practice?

These are questions that every licensed acupuncturist and doctor of Oriental medicine should ask. Sadly, many practitioners have never really been involved, and most seem to be uninterested. In my teachings, many of the future practitioners I have encountered show little or no interest in the political process; many others are not registered to vote. Yet it is the elected officials that control our lives and practices through the legislation they sponsor and get passed, both on the state and national levels.

Want to get involved? Start on the local level. Attend a city council meeting and meet the lawmakers. Many times, these same people later run for state or national offices. Call another acupuncturist in your city or town and make an appointment to talk with your local assemblyperson. You are a small business owner in their precinct, as well as a constituent. Representatives like to hear from the people they represent. They want to know your concerns.

It is wise to meet all of the candidates running for office in your area. This gives you the opportunity to share what you know about acupuncture with them and lets you ask them how they feel about acupuncture.

What is happening with acupuncture on the state and national levels? Let's take a quick look.

During this past month, many students from the Oriental medicine schools in southern California have volunteered to work for political campaigns. They have folded papers, stuffed them into envelopes and had them sealed, stamped and mailed out. While doing so, they have had the chance to speak with candidates and share information with their staffs.

This gives recognition to acupuncture and Oriental medicine. When it is time for new laws to be authored on the state level, the legislators can be reminded about the help they received from the acupuncture profession during their campaign. Even though the volunteers spent only a few hours of their time, it is amazing to see what can be accomplished.

On the national level, Congress is beginning to look at House Resolution 1890, the Federal Acupuncture Coverage Act, which is designed to provide reimbursement for acupuncture in the Medicare system. This bill would open acupuncture services to millions of older people in the U.S. and allow many of them to receive the care they need.

We must launch a letter-writing, e-mail and telephone campaign encouraging our representatives to cosponsor this bill and vote yes on its passage. I know personally of more than 250 students who have already contacted their officials encouraging them to vote in favor of this bill. I now challenge you to contact your representatives and do the same.

As I write this, there are more than eight months remaining until our national elections in November. That's plenty of time for you to learn about the political process in your area; to make a difference and let yourself be heard when deciding who will represent your concerns both locally and nationally.

Before you retire for the evening, ask yourself these three questions:

1. Am I registered to vote?
2. Do I know the names of my local, state and national representatives?
3. Do I know where my representatives stand on the issues that are most important to myself and my profession?

If you answered "no" to any of the above questions, it's time for you to do something about it. It's time for you to get involved. Don't be part of the problem; be part of the process!

MARCH 2000