

An Idea Whose Time Has Come

The true age of Oriental medicine has been discussed for years, if not centuries. Suffice it to say that while Oriental medicine is old outside the United States, it is relatively young inside.

With age comes sageness. Abroad, Oriental medicine has received praise for its accumulation of experience, judgement and wisdom. As a profession, however, we are viewed in the United States as mere teenagers, so to speak.

As our profession ages in this country, we have begun to gain power, clout and acceptance. The question is: does the profession have time to mature? All fields of medicine are moving at lightning speed. There is a rise in the number of specialists. Managed care is having a much bigger impact. More people are seeking complementary and alternative medicine, including a huge shift toward the acceptance of herbal medicines. More people are covered by health insurance policies, and it is difficult if not impossible to keep up with the amount of new medications on the market.

At the same time, there has been a decrease in the number and level of insurance reimbursements. There is a lack of universal insurance acceptance and coverage, and of course, there is the problem of acupuncture not being licensed in all 50 states.

We need a strong political lobbying presence, both on the state and national levels. Hospital privileges and Oriental medicine are being mainstreamed, and it's only fair that we be included and recognized in that process.

Due to the profession's newness and the great acceptance of Oriental medicine by the American people, we are moving to the forefront. Now is the time to take an even greater step forward.

Can this step be taken alone? Looking at the reality of what it takes to make progress, can this be accomplished within the profession, or are outside forces needed?

Medical doctors and chiropractors have recently found themselves in need of help to accomplish their goals. These groups look around for years at which groups achieved their objectives and had political power. They came to the conclusion that unions and union-related ideas held the answers to some of their questions.

Both the MDs and DCs contacted the United Service Workers of America. Self-employed chiropractors and medical doctors could not be union members, nor could they participate in collective bargaining. Could this situation be resolved? Could physicians become members of a union?

At that point, union leaders and executives from the American Medical Association began to talk. The entire medical membership was contacted and polled. Should medical doctors unionize? Could they? Would they?

The answer has turned out to be yes to all three questions. At its annual House of Delegates meeting this past summer, the AMA one of the largest member-based physician associations in the country, and an organization that strongly supports the rights of individual physicians - voted to

unionize.

Why Unionize?

What do unions bring to the table?

1. They bring political power and clout.
2. They provide their members with contacts and networks.
3. Unions are the largest purchasers of health care insurance plans in the U.S., purchasing an average of 54 million policies a year.
4. They support other unions. Through contacts and networks, acupuncture and Oriental medicine could become covered services in union insurance plans.
5. Unions want to regain their purchasing power by being able to deliver medical services purchased by a health plan with less intervention from managed care.

Unions are looking to work directly with medical professionals to restore services to the health insurance policies of their members. However, the idea of union membership involves collective bargaining, and since they are self-employed, medical professionals cannot bargain collectively.

A bill is currently being debated in Congress that would allow medical professionals to engage in collective bargaining, but that bill has yet to be voted on. Still, medical professions want to join or form a union. Thus, the idea of an acupuncture guild.

The Benefits of Acupuncture Guilds

Being in a guild makes you part of the union while still giving you a separate identity. Membership in a guild would be an additional benefit to your membership in a local, state and/or national professional association.

The smallest number of people that can form an acupuncture guild is 25. There is no limit to how large a guild can be. Because membership in a guild requires that you also belong to a professional organization in the medical field, many local societies have grown in membership and benefited from their formation.

What do unions want? More members, of course. There is strength in numbers, and this concept holds especially true when it comes to unions.

Is the formation of an acupuncture guild the wave of the future? Should acupuncturists unionize? This idea is already being actively discussed in several states.

How do you feel about an acupuncture guild? Would you like to know more? If so, we'd like to hear from you. Contact your local, state and national associations and see what their feelings are. Better yet, have your associations contact *Acupuncture Today*. This is your chance to let your thoughts be known and ideas be heard.

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