

Compassion, Integrity and Understanding: My Message to the Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine Profession

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I am the president of the Santa Barbara College of Oriental Medicine, which celebrated its 20th anniversary this year. I am also a licensed acupuncturist, and have been practicing Oriental medicine since the early '70s. Having spent the last 20 years involved in Oriental medicine as a practitioner and educator, I am thrilled to see all the positive changes that have evolved in our profession. We have overcome many obstacles, and we can see quite clearly how much of an opportunity we have before us.

My message to our profession and its student/practitioner population is that as we grow, we need to keep a strong focus on our goals. We have the opportunity to provide a more balanced view of medicine to our country and the world at large. Caution needs to be utilized in our quest for acceptance into the mainstream of Western medicine so that our roots of compassion, integrity, self-care and emphasis of prevention as a means of healing do not get lost in the burdens of day-to-day administration of care.

Our college strives to nurture in each student the ability to heal with the components of Oriental medicine: breathing exercises (*qi gong*, etc.); movement exercises (*tai chi*, etc.); nutrition; lifestyle considerations; moxibustion; shiatsu and *tuina*; acupuncture; and herbs. Equally important is the ability of the students to see themselves as healers, not just practitioners of Oriental medicine. This involves a sense of dedication to patients and their needs. You must have the compassion for your patients' choices without judgement; the integrity to always have the needs of your patients come first (not your own needs of time, finances or ego); and you must understand the need to help patients empower their own health care through education and prevention.

It is a privilege to be in the healing profession, yet it is a business that needs to be given its proper care and attention as well. These should not be mutually exclusive, and it is our job as educators and professionals to show how this can be accomplished in the real world.

Our profession needs to be involved in active research, with better cooperation among educational institutions to further academic excellence and compassionate care. It is up to us to enhance and support the health of our country. As a profession, we have an obligation to provide health care for those in need and to lobby for the means to make this happen. Our job is not only to heal on an individual level, but to look around us and notice the suffering -- then get out there and do our best to alleviate it in any way possible. I want to inspire our students, fellow practitioners and educators to open their hearts to the pain that is surrounding the health care of our friends, family and country, and think creatively about how you can make a difference. I hope many of you will send me your thoughts and ideas on this subject so that we can collaborate on solutions.

