

AAMA Exec Testifies before White House CAM Commission

FULL TESTIMONY AVAILABLE ONLINE

Editorial Staff

On December 7, 2001, the White House Commission on Complementary and Alternative Medicine Policy (WHCCAMP) held its final public hearing at the offices of the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland. Among those who testified at the commission's final meeting was Dr. William Rutenberg, chair of the American Academy of Medical Acupuncture's medical acupuncture advisory committee. This was the first appearance before the commission for Dr. Rutenberg, a specialist in pediatrics and medical acupuncture from Logan Grove, Illinois. Previous AAMA executives to testify included Drs. Joseph Helms, the Academy's founding president, and Marshall Sager, its current president.

Speaking on behalf of the AAMA, Dr. Rutenberg opened his testimony by emphasizing his organization's obligation to the safety of medical acupuncture. He stated that the Academy "is committed to making medical acupuncture safe, effective and accessible to an informed public," and that its members "are dedicated to creating a uniformed voice among acupuncture providers, immune to interprofessional politics and special interest groups."

Rutenberg opined that Western-trained physicians should be the main source of access through which patients could learn about complementary and alternative medicine, particularly acupuncture. In the U.S., most people still seek out "conventional" medical treatment first before turning to a CAM practitioner for help. "As people trust their physician to be their primary source for health care information, Western physicians will open the door to CAM therapies for most of America," Rutenberg said. "Endorsing physician practice of medical acupuncture will increase access to holistic coordinated medical care."

One of the benefits of being seen by a medical acupuncturist, Rutenberg added, is that patients would receive care from someone who has a background in Western-based medicine, but who uses an Eastern approach to the relationship between mind and body.

"Our patients know that we are applying Western pathophysiology to their problems, but they also value that we are looking at the mind-body relationship through an Eastern paradigm," he said. "I have repeatedly found that when people see my AAMA certificate on my office wall, they become open and discuss freely their desires for a more holistic approach to their health care, their desire for me to incorporate acupuncture into their care and, to the limits of my knowledge, other forms of complementary medicine."

Education and safety have always been two of the most pressing issues facing the acupuncture and Oriental medicine profession. Dr. Rutenberg assured the Commission that his organization's members provide optimal patient care by adhering to strict training and safety guidelines as set forth by the World Health Organization in 1999.

"One criterion for full membership in the AAMA," Rutenberg noted, "is the completion of a

minimum of 220 hours of formal training in a medical acupuncture program that meets AAMA standards. These standards, endorsed by the World Federation of Acupuncture and Moxibustion Societies and WHO, have become the international standard."

But following international standards is not always enough to make people believe in acupuncture's effectiveness. In the West, particularly in the United States, there is an overwhelming demand for scientific evidence that proves acupuncture works. Randomized, controlled trials using large patient bases are the key to the incorporation of acupuncture into health care plans and insurance programs, and physicians (such as those that belong to the AAMA), Rutenberg feels, are the perfect way to bridge the evidence gap.

"Schooled in Western medicine, we evaluate clinical results from a scientific, evidence-based foundation that American patients understand and trust, and that third-party payers require," Rutenberg said. "Physicians, trained in medical acupuncture, presenting and publishing research based on sound scientific principles, at national medical meetings and in peer-reviewed journals, are making believers of Western-trained physicians."

Rutenberg concluded his testimony by quoting two well-known principles espoused by the University of Arizona's School of Integrative Medicine, and asked for the Commission's endorsement of medical acupuncture. "It is my hope (that) the commission will adopt 'a philosophy that neither rejects conventional medicine nor accepts alternative medicine uncritically' and recognizes 'that good medicine should be based in good science, inquiry-driven and open to new paradigms,'" he said. "Endorsement of medical acupuncture by this Commission will create a cadre of physicians who will bring acupuncture, and by association CAM, into our medical centers, into our medical school curricula and to our patients."

Full Copy of Testimony Available Online

A transcript of Dr. Rutenberg's testimony to the White House Commission can be accessed for free via the Internet at www.acupuncturetoday.com/news/rutenberg.php. Complete transcripts of the December 7 meeting (and all prior meetings) can be accessed by visiting the Commission's website (www.whccamp.hhs.gov) and clicking the "Meetings" tab.

About the WHHCAMP

The White House Commission on Complementary and Alternative Medicine Policy was established by President Clinton on March 7, 2000. The Commission has been charged with researching CAM practices and products; delivery of (and public access to) CAM services; dissemination of reliable information on CAM to health care providers and the general public; and appropriate licensing, education and training of CAM health care practitioners. Its mission is to provide a report, through the secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, on legislative and administrative recommendations for assuring that public policy maximizes the benefits of complementary and alternative medicine to Americans.

The Commission's final report is due to the president in March 2002. *Acupuncture Today* will provide a detailed synopsis on the report's findings once it is made available.

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