

# Rebirthing AOBTA: A Retrospective of Three Years as President

Barbra Esher, AOBTA CI. Dipl. ABT & Ac. (NCCAOM), LAC

What do Shiatsu, Amma, *Chi Nei Tsang*, *Nuad Bo'Rarn*, *Tuina*, Acupressure, Jin Shin Do™ and Anma Therapy all have in common? Yes, they have foreign-sounding names, but you won't find them on a menu: they are all forms of Asian bodywork therapy (ABT). They have evolved in different parts of the world but, like acupuncture and Chinese herbs, they have their roots in Chinese medicine.

Evidence indicates bodywork predates other branches of Chinese medicine. Our logo, painted and presented to AOBTA by Professor Jin-Huai Wang, means "bodywork" and dates back 4,000-6,000 years ago to China. It was found carved on bones in ancient prescriptions such as, "For stomach pain, press on a point 3 *cun* below the knee" (sound familiar?). Professor Wang believes that Asian bodywork is the mother of Chinese medicine.

As members of the Chinese medicine community, we have more similarities than differences. We have the same theoretical framework. The NCCAOM offers national certification for Asian bodywork therapists, as well as for acupuncturists and Chinese herbologists. We have the same challenges, including educating the public on the benefits of our work and assuring our right to practice in each state.

In writing an article about the last three years as president of AOBTA, I figured I needed to make sure you knew who we are before I tell you what it is we have done!

AOBTA stands for the American Organization for Bodywork Therapies of Asia. It is a professional membership association which advocates public policy that protects and promotes Asian bodywork therapy and its practitioners, while honoring the diversity of the disciplines we embrace. AOBTA serves its community of members by:

- initiating appropriate credentialing criteria;
- defining practice and educational standards;
- providing resources for training, networking, and professional development and
- promoting public education about the benefits of our work and our principles and standards.

This is the mission statement the Board of Directors and I created during our strategic planning meeting at the beginning of my term. To accomplish our goals, we started a "Stars" campaign that raised over \$10,000, \$5,000 of it from board members. We also slashed operating expenses of the organization, covering many of them out of our own pockets, so that we would be working securely in the black.

One of the first challenges we faced was that a significant number of people were offended by the word "Oriental" in our name, when we were known as the American Oriental Bodywork Therapy Association (AOBTA). I know that the OM community has wrestled with this issue for years and has kept using the word, but rather than potentially driving the problem deeper into our "body" by suppressing it, we used principles of Chinese medicine, brought it to the surface and allowed everyone to vent their opinions. When everyone felt that their opinions had been heard, we voted

and that was it. We were able to keep our acronym and are still known as AOBTA.

### Advocating Public Policy That Protects and Promotes Asian Bodywork Therapists

AOBTA has been proactive in the legislative arena by creating coalitions within the bodywork community. An issue in the past has been that Asian bodywork therapy was automatically subsumed under massage laws without consideration of our separate-but-equal training requirements and different national certification. This left many ABTs in the situation of having to go back to school to take a massage program when they already had as much as three years of training in their field. Already, 12 states have adopted the NCCAOM's ABT exam as an alternative to the national certification examination as we continue working to ensure equitable treatment and recognition of ABT in all states.

### Honoring the Diversity of the Disciplines We Embrace

I believe this to be one of our greatest strengths, which has developed even further these past three years. AOBTA used to be thought of as exclusive in a clique-ish sense. We are still discerning in the fact that we adhere to our high standards, but we also welcome and honor all forms of ABT that follow our common curriculum requirements.

### Initiating Appropriate Credentialing Criteria

Creating our own national exam has been a goal of the AOBTA since we were created 12 years ago. During the last three years, we have supported the NCCAOM in the first two administrations of the Asian bodywork therapy exam. Many of our members have passed the exam, receiving all of the benefits of national credentialing.

### Defining Practice and Educational Standards

Education has made strides over the past three years with the development of our Council of Schools and Programs (COSP). We have seen the biggest growth spurt of COSP since the beginning of AOBTA. An added benefit to membership is that graduates of COSP schools automatically qualify to take the NCCAOM's ABT exam. We have adjusted the fee to encourage smaller schools to join and have also strengthened the communications structure. With the addition of an interim board position of COSP Director, we are hoping to grow and support COSP even more.

AOBTA has also expanded requirements for the student membership category to encourage more students to become involved with the organization, exposing them to the wonders of ABT and our standards of practice. A new category of membership, the Register Instructor (RI) level, has been created as well. Requested by our members, the purpose of this level is to create:

- an incentive for those who wish to use it as a step/preparation towards upgrading to Certified Instructor (CI) level;
- a viable alternative for those who do not wish to have their own program or meet the requirements of CI, yet are valuable skilled instructors in the field of ABT and/or Chinese medicine; and
- a way to spread the work of ABT to underserved and remote areas.

### Providing Resources for Training, Networking, and Professional Development

As president of AOBTA, I have had the pleasure of being involved in and attending three top-notch conventions in which we have had some of the best presenters in the field. We have also held six regional seminars at regular intervals between conventions. Speakers have included Kiiko

Matsumoto; Jeffrey Yuen; Alex Tiberi; Rick Gold; Pauline Sasaki; Bill Helm; Lonny Jarret; Pamela Ferguson; Jin-Huai Wang; Robbee Fian; Harriet Beinfield; and Efrem Korngold, as well as many other talented and engaging educators in our field.

As a networking tool and as an informative journal, our newsletter *Pulse* has continued to evolve in marvelous ways under the direct guidance of editor-in-chief Deborah Valentine Smith. Not only is it organized and even more readable, it arrives more regularly, more often and has increased in size by 50%.

Networking opportunities have increased with the development of more state chapters. AOBTA has broadened its networking into the worldwide arena of ABT and expanded its international relationships as well.

#### Promoting Public Education about the Benefits of Our Work, Our Principles and Standards

AOBTA has benefited from more media attention than ever. *Natural Health*, Andrew Weil's *Self-Healing* and other publications have referred readers to AOBTA as the resource for information and practitioners of ABT. Two new beautiful brochures have been professionally designed; one outlining the benefits of membership, the other available as a promotional tool to inform potential clients about our work and who we are. We have a new website as well ([www.aobta.org](http://www.aobta.org)), thanks to our extraordinary webmaster Randall Sexton. It has a practitioner locator database as well as information about ABT and AOBTA. And if all that wasn't enough, we have also created a list of companies and organizations that give our members discounts. We even send members items such as pens and decals as promotional material.

I can't stress enough that the board of directors deserves the credit for AOBTA's "rebirthing" the last three years. We play and work well together, and I believe we have infused a fun, warm and caring atmosphere into the organization. Bear with me while I personally thank board members Debra Howard (who will be the next president by the time this is printed!); Yolanda Asher; Stuart Watts; Pauline Sasaki; Elene Page; Ruth Dalphin; Pamela Ferguson; Lynn Meffert; Rylen Feeney; Maria Spuller; Wayne Mylin; Phil Guzelf; and Toshiko Phipps. We couldn't have accomplished any of this without a huge amount of commitment and work from everyone on the AOBTA Board and the support from the staff, Angela Pflugfelder and Janet Dobbs. I will be continuing on as director of education while Debra Howard continues to carry out AOBTA's mission!

Most important, though, I'd like to thank all AOBTA members for their support. We couldn't do anything without our members! They really are the ones that create the yin substances (membership dues and even extra donations) that support our yang activities. It's their involvement that makes AOBTA all that we are so we can continue to promote the field of Chinese medicine as a whole.

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