

Eleven Months of Change

Michael Devitt

A lot has happened to the acupuncture and Oriental medicine profession since my last guest column 11 months ago. Admittedly, some of the news has not been good. Three schools have closed; another may or may not be closing; and a fifth school has temporarily shut its doors while it searches for a new campus. It's a little disconcerting to see that many schools close down in less than a year's time - in fact, it's unprecedented.

Fortunately, the amount of negative news concerning acupuncture and Oriental medicine is in the minority. The fact is, there are a lot of things the profession should be proud about.

To begin with, there are clear signs that acupuncture is becoming more popular. For instance, last year, the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine released the results a survey that found that nearly one out of every 10 U.S. adults has tried acupuncture - in other words, approximately 20 million Americans have tried it at some time in their lives.

At about the same time NCCAOM released its survey, *Newsweek's* Dec. 2, 2002 issue ran a special report titled "The Science of Alternative Medicine," with a cover photo that featured a woman receiving acupuncture. In all, 30 pages of the Dec. 2 issue were devoted to Chinese medicine, herbal therapies, and other forms of alternative care. *Newsweek* has a worldwide circulation of 4.4 million (3.85 million in the United States). Imagine how much free publicity our profession received from that story.

There also are positive signs the profession's leaders are putting aside their philosophical and personal differences and trying to work together. Last June, representatives from the Acupuncture Alliance and the American Association of Oriental Medicine (AAOM) sat down and hammered out an official memorandum of understanding. Under the memorandum, the Alliance and AAOM "agree, in good faith, to work together whenever feasible to move the profession ahead," and that "to accomplish these ends, the two organizations will work together in areas of common interest where feasible in an effort to avoid unproductive conflict and cross-purposes." I don't know if such an agreement has been reached before, but I applaud the AAOM and the Alliance for making the effort.

Legislatively, the profession still faces some challenges. Several states still do not have laws in effect that allow for the practice of acupuncture by licensed acupuncturists, and as we go to press, a legislative battle is taking shape over two bills that have been introduced in Arkansas.

But the profession has also had its share of victories. In New York, practitioners survived a major scare, as bills that would have opened up the practice of acupuncture to podiatrists and restricted the use of laser therapy were tabled by the legislature. In Colorado, a new bill was passed that, among other things, lets acupuncturists use the "LAc" designation. In California, the passage of Senate Bill 1951 extended the life of the state's acupuncture board through June 2005; the passage of Senate Bill 1943 raises curriculum hours for students and ensures programs have a minimum number of educational hours to receive board approval. A bill in New Mexico, currently awaiting the governor's signature, would confirm that practitioners of Oriental medicine have the same

status as primary-care physicians. And in Arizona and Idaho, legislation is being proposed that would toughen practice standards for non-acupuncturists.

On the education front, things are shaping up nicely. After more than a decade of work, doctoral programs are becoming a reality. Last May, Bastyr University and the Oregon College of Oriental Medicine received approval from ACAOM to begin offering clinical doctoral programs. OCOM's doctoral program will begin this summer; Bastyr's will start in the fall. A handful of other schools are ramping up their doctoral projects for 2004. These programs will be responsible for producing the next generation of researchers, educators and leaders in the acupuncture and Oriental medicine profession. I wish the programs, and the doctoral candidates who enroll in them, the greatest success in their endeavors.

These are all signs that the profession is changing for the better, and as the profession changes, so does *Acupuncture Today*. We are always thinking of ways to improve the publication, so that each issue is better than the last. We try to provide the latest news and information, and to keep the topics current and interesting.

In the past few months, a number of columnists took time off to pursue other interests. Originally, we were unsure how to handle the situation, but as the saying goes, when one door closes, another opens. In this case, several individuals jumped through that door and seized the opportunity.

In December, we announced a call for columnists. The response was amazing; after reviewing dozens of sample articles and submissions, we selected 10 practitioners from across the country to write on a variety of topics, some of whom have already appeared or will be appearing soon. In the March issue, Brad and Lori Gilbert published the first article in their medical *qigong* column. In this issue, you'll find articles by Andrew Rader and Don Matesz on nutrition and wellness, and Nancy Post, whose column is titled "Bring Your Body to Work." Next month, we are scheduled to publish new columns in research; geriatrics; infrared imaging; Asian bodywork therapy; and an internationally based column, "The View From Shanghai." Independent of our call for columnists, Dr. Yong Piang Jiang and Jennifer Waters contacted us separately about writing for *Acupuncture Today*; both have been added into the rotation as regular contributors.

Columnists and guest authors are an important component of *Acupuncture Today*; they are (in my opinion) the glue that holds *AT* together. Without them, my job would be much more difficult, and the publication you now hold in your hands wouldn't have reached the level of status and recognition it has. I want to publicly thank each of our new columnists in advance for agreeing to write for the publication, and I hope *AT*'s readers enjoy the work of the new columnists as much as they've enjoyed the work of our continuing writers.

There are so many more items I could write about - the dozens of positive acupuncture studies published in peer-reviewed scientific journals; the government-funded trials on different aspects of traditional Chinese medicine; the new recommendations for acupuncture research; and the new state and national organizations being formed - but space prohibits me from expanding on these ideas further.

The past 11 months have been good to the acupuncture and Oriental medicine profession. I'm glad to be (in my own small way) a part of it, and I look forward to seeing what the future brings.

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