

National Visioning Process Developed for the Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine Profession

Authored by Members of the Vision Search Task Force

Those who understand the history of acupuncture and Oriental medicine in the United States would likely agree that this profession has been a "house divided" for many years. Certain factions within the profession have attempted to advance conflicting agendas for shaping the future of the profession that have been reflected in past legislative/regulatory battles and disputes among different constituencies regarding changes to licensure laws; educational standards; scope of practice; licensure titles; the role of Oriental medicine in the U.S. health care system, etc. These disputes have been destructive and waste limited resources that would be better utilized to address the pressing challenges to the profession, and also have not helped to improve the profession's credibility with the public. The national organizations agree that it is critical to heal the divisions within the profession so that the profession as a whole can successfully meet future challenges.

To this end, at the May 2002 national meetings in San Francisco, AAOM, the Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine Alliance, CCAOM, NCCAOM, and ACAOM agreed to develop a consensus-building process under Dr. Bill Prensky's leadership for establishing a "National Vision" for the AOM profession that would help to channel the energy from the previous in-fighting and disputes into a productive path for the future.

Dr. Prensky is uniquely positioned to spearhead this effort. He is one of the longest-tenured members of the practicing profession of AOM, the first non-Far East-Asian licensed as an acupuncturist in the United States (Oregon, 1974), the first non-Asian to be appointed to an AOM licensing board (Oregon, 1974), and is one of the founders of the first formal AOM educational institutions in the country. More recently, Dr. Prensky developed and directed the Mercy College graduate program in acupuncture and Oriental medicine in New York, and had served with the Council of Colleges of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine since 1982. He also has extensive experience with the Future Vision Search process. Dr. Prensky was a founder, board member and chair of the New York Chamber of Commerce, and is a founding member of The Future Work Institute in New York, a group of experts devoted to developing working images of the workplace of the future.

A budget was developed for the visioning process, which the five national organizations agreed to sponsor, in an effort to achieve a consensual vision for the future. Armed with this sponsorship, Daniel Holland, PhD, was contracted to work with Dr. Prensky as a co-facilitator and developer of the Vision Search Task Force process for AOM. Dr. Holland is an expert in leadership development, formerly with Towers Perrin (the largest human resource consulting firm in the world), and is now working independently in California.

The Future Search Process

Future Search is a specific process that has been utilized by communities of all kinds throughout the world. Organizations as diverse as General Electric, Motorola, municipalities, membership

organizations, educational institutions, and entire professions have used this process for over 20 years to develop consensual visions of their futures. As applied to the AOM community, the Future Search process consists of a number of steps designed to lead to a vision of the future that all stakeholder groups of the AOM community develop together and own in common.

The initial steps in the process involved identifying a core group of stakeholders for whom the current situation in the AOM community have a history and for whom the attaining of a common and shared vision is vital. The five national organizations sponsoring the process have these elements that they share together, and are vitally interested in resolving the problems that have plagued the profession. Each of these organizations agreed to fund the initial stages of the process, reach out to all other stakeholder groups, and begin to model and develop a broader and more formal Future Search conference.

The Vision Search Task Force (VSTF), as the group has called itself, began its work in San Francisco in August 2002 with the goal of sponsoring a possible Future Search conference. At its initial meeting, the group established ground rules for its internal interactions designed to model the interactions that would help shape consensus building within the broader community. Using the models established in many Future Search processes, the group began to develop a Future Search conference plan for the AOM community.

Future Search conferences require enough participants to obtain a broad cross-section of opinion from the stakeholders in the decision making process. A typical Future Search conference includes between 50 and 75 participants selected from various parts of the community who meet together over three days to come to a consensual view of a desired future. A powerful vision statement accomplishes the following:

- It presents where the profession wants to go.
- It is easy to read and understand.
- It can be used to guide decision making.
- It describes an achievable, preferred, and meaningful future state.
- It can be felt/experienced/gives people goose bumps when they hear it.
- It gives all stakeholders a better understanding of how their individual objectives may be realized.
- It provides a motivating force, even in hard times.
- It unites the entire profession behind a single vision so that all stakeholders within the profession are working toward a common goal and not at cross-purposes.

To develop a comprehensive vision statement, many voices will need to be heard, including, but not limited to, state and national associations; patients and consumers; practitioners; schools; students; and regulatory boards.

The process of seeking initial input to inform a possible "national vision" for the profession was begun as a town hall meeting held in May 2003 at the Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine Alliance's annual conference in Safety Harbor, Fla., during which all attendees described their views as to the desired future for the profession. Other town hall meetings are scheduled for later this year. Following these meetings and other opportunities for input by all stakeholders, the intent of the VSTF is to hold a formal Future Search conference, for which we are seeking funding, sometime in the next 18 months to consider this input. The participants in a Future Search conference would work towards the development of:

- an attainable and inspirational vision for the future practice of acupuncture and Oriental medicine that includes all voices in the profession;
- a national dialogue to encourage an acceptance of this vision;

- credible and effective guidelines for strategic planning and conflict resolution in the future; and
- a positive result leading to a clear mandate for Vision Search 2013.

The Future Search conference would confront some of the commonly held questions the VSTF has identified. These include questions similar to the following.

- What will the role and scope of the practitioner of acupuncture & Oriental medicine be in 2013, and how must this be reflected in national standards for education (accreditation) and certification?
- What are the licensing issues involved in what practitioners will do?
- How do we relate to and integrate with other practices of medicine and health-care, including other professions interested in the practicing aspects of Oriental medicine?
- What "tiers" should exist, if any, within the profession?
- What code of conduct and "processes" can help ensure professional and effective resolution of future conflict?

In the end, the vision arrived at by a Future Search conference would represent the common work of a broad cross-section of the stakeholders in AOM in this country, and would be available for use by all communities of interest in developing their own strategic plans and activities for the next decade of AOM development. The vision could also be used as the basis for a national strategic plan for the profession on how that vision can be achieved nationally. This initiative has the potential of not only healing the divisions within the profession, but also of ensuring that limited resources are not wasted through in-fighting when they are needed to meet the much more critical external challenges and threats to the profession.

Next Steps

Two additional town hall meetings are scheduled in which all stakeholders will be invited to provide input into the process for establishing a future vision. Town hall meetings will be held on Saturday, August 2, from 7:00 PM to 10:00 PM in conjunction with the CSOMA conference at the San Francisco Airport Westin Hotel in San Francisco, Calif., and on Friday, November 14, 2003 from 7:30 PM to 10:30 PM in conjunction with the AAOM 2003 conference at the Coronado Springs Resort in Orlando, Fla.

In addition, the VSTF has set up a special e-mail address for members of the AOM community to provide input into the visioning process. If you wish to share your vision for the profession in 2013 with the VSTF, please send your comments to vstftownhall@yahoo.com. Reviewing all posted input is possible by joining Yahoo Groups at <http://groups.yahoo.com>, then joining the town hall group by following the instructions at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/vstftownhall>.

The intent is for the visioning process to culminate in a national Future Search conference to be held sometime in the next 18 months to consider this and other input. Participants of the conference would be a representative cross-section of the entire profession who would work over a three-day period to develop a national consensual vision for the profession.

Conclusion

As AOM enters its third decade of professional service to the American public as a formal part of the national health care system, it is important that the profession and all its communities of interest join together to envision a strong and unified future. A consensual vision is essential to maintaining a diverse and productive approach to the practice of AOM in this country and around the world.

With a history of strong growth and development behind us, the AOM professional communities now need to enter a new era of cooperation and understanding, both within our own communities and with all the other providers and professional organizations around us. The ultimate goal of the Vision Search Task Force is for the profession to develop and move towards a strong vision of its future. We welcome and urge all stakeholders in the profession to fully embrace and support this important effort. Your input and participation will be critical in the months to come!

Members of the Vision Search Task Force

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