

Opportunity Is Knocking

By now, whether you live in California or not, I'm sure you have heard about the special recall election being held here later this month. You probably have an opinion about the recall - who's the best candidate, whether it should even be held, etc. - and an opinion about the residents of California. I respect your opinion, but I also want you to know that this situation isn't unique. No matter where you live, politics (and the ramifications of politics) play a huge role in your life and practice. It's the state legislatures that make the acupuncture and Oriental medicine laws; those statutes shape the way we practice. Legislators formulate the scope of practice for a given profession, and each state's governor either signs or vetoes laws to that effect.

Along with the recall election, another important part of the political process is taking shape in California. This process will affect the Oriental medicine profession drastically. Those of you who don't practice here may ask why you should be interested in what's happening in California. The reason is, California - for lack of a better word - drives the profession. Approximately half of all licensed acupuncturists in the United States practice in California, so if something important happens here, you can bet it's going to have an impact on the practice of acupuncture in the rest of the country.

The process I am referring to is the Milton Marks "Little Hoover" Commission, a bipartisan, independent oversight agency that was created in 1962. The Commission's mission is to investigate state government operations and - through reports, recommendations and legislative proposals - promote efficiency, economy and improved service to the citizens of California. The reason this is so important is that hearings are currently being conducted by the commission that will hopefully resolve legislative issues regarding our profession that occurred in the most recent session of the California legislature. Let me offer a brief explanation.

Last year, a situation arose during the legislative session in which there was a great deal of opposition to legislation introduced to raise the number of educational hours for Oriental medicine providers. Because of significant differences in opinion, the legislature requested that the Little Hoover Commission (short for the Milton Marks Little Hoover Commission on California State Government Organization and Economy) conduct a comprehensive analysis consisting of the following reviews and evaluations, and then report their findings and recommendations to the legislature no later than Sept. 1, 2004:

1. Review and make recommendations on the scope of practice for acupuncturists.
2. Review and make recommendations on the educational requirements for acupuncturists.
3. Evaluate the national examination, administered by the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, and make recommendations as to whether or not the national examination should be offered in California in lieu of, or as part of the state examination.
4. Evaluate and make recommendations on the approval process of the Bureau of Private Postsecondary Education and the California Acupuncture Board's approval process.

This summer, the commissioners of the Little Hoover Commission requested and created an Acupuncture Advisory Committee to the commission. This committee has been charged with

attending meetings, holding a series of fact-finding sessions, and giving input to the commission. Committee members were also given a series of questions to respond to in writing for the commissioners. To date, the committee has held two fact-finding sessions, with the third scheduled for later this month. These sessions present an important opportunity for all individuals and groups to present information, facts and surveys regarding the practice of Oriental medicine in California and the rest of the country.

I cannot tell you how important this process is. As I mentioned, the Little Hoover Commission is an independent body that functions on the state level, much as the General Accounting Office and the National Academy of Sciences function on the federal level. It represents an esteemed panel of individuals looking for and requesting information on Oriental medicine. As a result, everyone is being asked to participate. Representatives from acupuncture schools, officials from the NCCAOM and the Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, and individual Oriental medicine practitioners have been asked to provide information. This is an unprecedented opportunity, and I urge everyone who is related to the profession to participate.

I am fortunate enough to have been appointed to the Acupuncture Advisory Committee. I've also experienced firsthand what it's like to try and answer their questions. The experience is amazing: It's like sharing information about acupuncture with someone for the first time. The commissioners are asking serious, well-thought-out questions, not just about how acupuncture works, but about the entire profession. They want to know how many people see an acupuncturist for treatment; they want to know about the prerequisites for entering acupuncture school; they want to know whether we favor the use of acupuncturist assistants; they want to know how we feel about medical doctors performing acupuncture; and so on.

After much fact gathering, from written sources and oral testimony, the Little Hoover Commission will digest the information, sort out the facts and deliver a position paper to the legislature. This process will shape the future of Oriental medicine in California and throughout the country.

This is an opportunity for everyone in the Oriental medicine profession - students; practitioners; suppliers; instructors; administrators; school officials; association executives; and so on - to put aside their differences and present a unified vision to an organization that has the power to effect real change. I urge everyone associated with the profession to come together and provide the Little Hoover Commission with the information they need.

This may be our best, last hope for uniting the profession. This is an opportunity we cannot afford to let pass by. Let's do our job and make the commission, and ourselves, proud.

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