

We Get Letters & E-Mail

Editorial Staff

There's More Than One Organization for Professional Herbalists

Dear Editor:

In your Sept. 2003 issue, the article entitled "American Herbalists Guild (AHG) to Hold Annual Conference in New Mexico" described the AHG as "... the only peer-review organization in the United States for professional herbalists who specialize in the medicinal use of plants." On inquiry, I was told that this information was gathered from the AHG Web site.

Probably most of *Acupuncture Today's* readers are aware of another national organization for those who use Chinese medicinal plants. Those who qualify through clinical and didactic training may sit for the national board examination given by the NCCAOM (National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine) to confer the status of diplomate of Chinese herbology. I hope our friends at *AT* and AHG will make note of this correction.

Mercy Yule, LAc
Bellevue, Washington

Illinois Practitioners Making Progress

Dear Editor:

In her editorial in the August issue ("Unity"), Marilyn Allen makes a number of excellent points regarding apathy in the Oriental medicine community at large. Unfortunately, she also implies that there is no acupuncture organization in Illinois, suggesting this is in some part responsible for the fact that an ephedra ban was passed here.

In fact, there are four acupuncture membership organizations in Illinois: the Illinois State Acupuncture Association (ISAA), which just celebrated its 20th anniversary; the Asian American Acupuncture Association (AAAA); and two Korean membership organizations. All of these groups, along with the Chicago branch of Pacific College of Oriental Medicine, are united under the umbrella of the Illinois Acupuncture Federation (IAF).

The IAF retains a lobbyist and is responsible for legislative activity in Illinois. This year, we launched a major campaign to change the Illinois Acupuncture Act to bring it more in line with national trends. The other Chicago school of acupuncture, Midwest College of Oriental Medicine, also employs a lobbyist. We are all united in the pursuit of our legislative goals.

Prior to the passage of the ephedra ban, the IAF spent several months educating the sponsors of the ban about the proper use of ephedra, the educational standards and qualifications of NCCAOM-certified herbalists. We accomplished this through phone calls, faxes, e-mails and numerous visits to the home offices of senators and representatives.

Our lobbyists had many personal meetings with the sponsors to try to secure an exemption for qualified herbalists, since we knew there was no way we could stop this legislation from being approved, due to the emotionally charged atmosphere of fear based on untrue information about ephedra.

Claudette Baker, ISAA president and AAOM president emeritus, with support from the AAOM and Mark Thoman, AAOM's counsel and fellow member of the Herbal Medicine Committee, spent several weeks pulling together the latest information on the ephedra issue to create an "Ephedra Position Paper" for the ISAA. The AAOM Board of Directors has approved these documents for nationwide distribution. The AAOM has been trying to reach all of the state association presidents to pass this information along, but has received little feedback as to whether they received the e-mails that were sent. (*Editor's note:* This document is now available on acupuncturetoday.com.)

Claudette Baker and Dean Mouscher, the IAF's executive director, spent a day in the Illinois capital of Springfield and met with all of the key sponsors of the ephedra ban bill. No, we did not stop the freight train that is the anti-ephedra movement. Emotions are running high due to the fact that a Northwestern University football player died after supposedly using ephedra. In addition, the U.S. senator spearheading the proposed nationwide ephedra ban is Illinois Democrat Dick Durbin. The sponsors of the Illinois legislation were, however, uniformly sympathetic, cooperative, and agreed to work with us in the future to create a reasonable exemption for licensed acupuncturists.

We are working hard to accomplish our goals of a modified scope of practice within a setting of opposition on a state level. Until 1997, acupuncture was a class IV felony in Illinois. It took the ISAA 13 years to pass the Acupuncture Practice Act. At that time, the Illinois Medical Society was unwilling to allow herbs to be regulated specifically by state law within the scope of practice of acupuncture. We are a young community, and are struggling to achieve our goals in the state legislature this year, including clear statutory language on herbs.

Ms. Allen's point regarding apathy is well taken, as we have undertaken these projects with the financial support of less than 30 percent of our small community. We have about 400 licensed acupuncturists in Illinois; 200 are chiropractors.

Please be advised that there is a national movement to ban ephedra state by state. Now is the time for every state association to find out what bills have been introduced so they can attempt to get an exemption for TCM herbalists. Mark Thoman has put together a report, "State Ephedra/Ephedrine Legislation," which will be available on the AAOM's Web site. (Note: This survey is based on an examination of texts downloaded from state Web sites during June and July, 2003. No other sources have been consulted, and no state authorities have been contacted.)

We call on all acupuncturists to support the profession. If you are not already a member, join your local acupuncture association, and one or both of the national associations (AAOM or NAOMA). Those working to improve the profession at all levels need the support of our entire community to be successful. If you would like to be a member of the AAOM Herbal Medicine Committee or participate in some way, please call Claudette Baker at (847) 998-8860.

The cosponsors of the Durbin bill are Senators Hilary Rodham Clinton (NY), Diane Feinstein (CA) and Charles Schumer (NY). They must each be contacted with our request to allow an exemption for qualified herbalists. The National Nutritional Foods Association's Web site (www.nnfa.org) has a link where you can automatically contact your senators and send a petition.

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Acupuncture Today welcomes your feedback. If you would like to respond to an article, please send your comments to:

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