

## Readers Respond to ACAOM Article

Editorial Staff

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In the June issue, *Acupuncture Today* published an article regarding a decision by the Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine to remove three commissioners from its board ("ACAOM Accused of Professional and Ethical Misconduct"). Since that article was published, *Acupuncture Today* has received numerous comments from the profession, including several letters to the editor, which are published below. The letters have not been edited, except to correct errors in spelling. Readers are also encouraged to view the comments from the May 2004 Acupuncture Poll, which are available online and were also published in the August issue.

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Dear Editor:

Regarding ACAOM's sudden and inappropriate dismissal of Virginia Hunkin from the commissioner position, I would like to offer the following statement.

Ms. Hunkin and I were classmates at the Academy of Oriental Medicine at Austin, Texas during 1996, and then at Texas College of Traditional Chinese Medicine during 1997. (Many students were transferring schools at that time for a variety of reasons, during difficult times.) Throughout these years, Virginia quickly rose above and beyond her peers, as she was able to diplomatically question authority in a constructive, positive and progressive manner. Honesty, integrity and absolute fairness were, and still are, the core of her intelligent and selfless character.

It is individuals of this caliber that put Oriental medicine on the map, and propelled it to greater acceptance by the conventional public at large. She is (a) credit to our industry.

I have no knowledge of ACAOM members, nor their practices. However, it is evident at this point that something is out of balance at ACAOM, and it is up to our industry to police ourselves, or we give outsiders more opportunity to discredit our professional standards, ethics and existence.

*Brenton Harvey, Dipl. Ac. & CH*  
*Denver, Colorado*

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Dear Editor:

I am very glad to see you bring issues on ACAOM to the light of day. It is appropriate for all those involved to have their side heard. As a former acupuncture student and registered nurse (private nursing school educator), I know how important it is that ethics be cleaned up at all levels, and discussion of all issues be given a public forum. The whole future of TCM and acupuncture in the United States depends on an ethical practice from the level of practitioner, to running of schools, to the boards who certify practitioners and schools.

Western medicine, despite its lack of integration of all possible healing modalities, has in place practices and education and laws regarding ethical treatment of patients and the creation of institutions. Acupuncturists and the institutions associated with their practice and training need also to have open information, be focused on the best outcome for care of the public, and to be held to the highest ethical standards.

*Michele Begley, RN, BSN*  
*Santa Monica, California*

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Dear Editor:

I would like to express my strong concern and dismay concerning the recent article in *Acupuncture Today* about the Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (ACAOM). Specifically, I am responding to the sensationalistic nature of this article concerning certain allegations made against ACAOM.

The acupuncture and Oriental medicine profession, including all the supportive organizations that are a part of it, stands at a crossroad. Our best path to a successful future lies along the way of cooperation and support within our various communities. ACAOM has played an essential role in helping to move all of us towards a unity of purpose, and has faithfully served the public and the profession well, and will continue to do so.

To address the issues to which the article in *Acupuncture Today* alludes, I would like to point out that every organization, both public and private, has the obligation and duty to ensure that it functions smoothly and efficiently in order to conduct its business. ACAOM is charged by the United States Department of Education (USDE) with the task of monitoring and approving the compliance of educational programs with nationally established standards pertaining to training entry-level practitioners to approved levels of competency. To perform that task, the USDE demands that the Commission be an independent body and that it appoint commissioners from all stakeholders in the professional and public arena who can work diligently together towards these common goals. To this end, ACAOM must from time to time make procedural and bylaws changes to ensure that it can fulfill its mandate. To the extent that ACAOM's actions are public, everyone is already privy to those decisions. But every organization has its own internal processes by which it conducts its business affairs. ACAOM is no exception.

For *Acupuncture Today* to publish an "investigative" article that merely restates unsubstantiated accusations from recently removed ex-commissioners, and then publish a survey asking the general public to judge this action of removal based upon only the information in that article, is irresponsible and, perhaps, journalistically unethical. It demands of the respondents to that survey that they based their decisions solely upon the published article. This activity does not support the profession or its growth in any way, and merely serves to undermine growing solidarity by sowing dissension and distrust within our profession.

I do not, nor should I, argue against the right of *Acupuncture Today* to publish whatever it may wish. However, the article in question would normally only be published after a lengthy and in-depth investigation of the facts, as is common in journalism. Since it is not appropriate or even possible to conduct such an investigation concerning issues relating to ACAOM's internal procedures, the subject hardly merits further journalist pursuit. What remains, therefore, is a biased and sensationalistic article regarding an internal organizational matter.

With the many challenges that face our profession, and the productive and emerging conversations

that are needed in order to address these challenges responsibly, conversations about the inner workings of the Commission might well be seen as a distraction that only serves a narrow interest. The impending threats of loss to access to our herbal pharmacopoeia due to new FDA regulations, the ongoing pursuit by certain chiropractors to practice acupuncture with substandard training, and challenges facing states with no licensing acts for acupuncture and Oriental medicine or with severely limited scopes of practice - these are the crucial issues of survival that need to have our full attention.

In summary, I fully support ACAOM. The commissioners continue to perform a vital service in protecting the public and ensuring that accredited institutions offer high-quality education to the future practitioners of acupuncture and Oriental medicine. Furthermore, I believe that the Commission is fulfilling these duties with skill, dedication, and concern for the outcome of its actions. ACAOM has come out of a period of change able to help the profession grow. I respectfully suggest that your attempt to scrutinize recent internal changes on the Commission has missed the mark and draws attention away from more important issues facing our profession.

*Lixin Huang, MS*

*President, Council of Colleges of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine*

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Dear Editor:

In response to your article, as a former student of the now-defunct Maryland Institute of Traditional Chinese Medicine (MITCM) which recently lost its accreditation, I can tell you that I am shocked, but not surprised, at the numerous allegations of the ACAOM. Dr. Uyeno spoke volumes when he was quoted as saying, "It is highly embarrassing that ACAOM does not appear to conduct itself in accordance with professional standards remotely similar to the standards which it asks accredited schools to maintain."

I find it disturbing that many of the allegations mentioned in your article were the exact same reasons that MITCM lost its accreditation:

- obvious and apparent conflicts of interest by board members;
- denying due process (pursuing the termination of a board member without allowing them to hear the complaints or defend themselves);
- failure to hold elections for officers as prescribed by the bylaws;
- failure to provide effective backup for computer files and proper record keeping;
- no formal written budgeting procedures;
- randomly changing bylaws to accommodate personal interests;
- unwillingness to provide 501(c)3 nonprofit financial information; and
- a director who reports to no one but the president (who was the only reviewer) and who was granted salary increases without seeking approval from the board.

People in glass houses should not throw stones.

*Jennifer Hanbury Pobiak, LAc*

*Rockville, Maryland*

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Dear Editor:

Thank you for your courage in taking on the problems relative to what appears to be Dort Bigg's seizure of absolute power at ACAOM. Given the complex politics involved, I was surprised to see

these issues addressed in your magazine, but unsurprised, if you will, that there was no follow-up of any kind in the succeeding issue.

None of us can underestimate the importance of ACAOM to our profession as a whole (no accreditation, no scholarships, etc.). Somehow it is imperative that these issues be addressed, and that ACAOM remain in the public domain, at least in terms of access/input from the profession and our academic colleagues. ACAOM is not meant as a sole proprietorship, and I am certain that when federal authorities look into the matter, ACAOM may well lose its own accreditation.

Mr. Bigg's actions are unconscionable and indefensible. That two public members and an extraordinarily well-qualified practitioner member were dismissed from the board by possibly illegal and heavy-handed means does not augur well for the future of ACAOM and, by extension, our profession.

*Michael Howden, LAc*  
*Kula Maui, Hawaii*

AUGUST 2004