

"Shopping" for Alternative Health Care

It's easy to stay on purpose when you see the results of care through your patients. When you help transform the lives of people by restoring their health, it's easy to focus on your practice.

However, there is a lot more to practice beyond witnessing the miracles of natural health care; many practitioners aren't prepared for the problems they will face in practice. One of these problems is understanding why patients have a hard time thinking beyond the Western medical model. People find it hard to let go of the medical approach and embrace the concept that acupuncture and Chinese medicine are effective alternatives.

In order to get people to understand natural health care is effective, you have to educate people about what you do. It's important to note that during the patient consultation, you have to heighten a person's awareness about what is going on with their body and health, so they recognize the need for care and understand why acupuncture can help them.

When you have someone come into your office, don't assume they are sold on natural health care. In my experience, many people are just "shopping" - trying to figure out what you have to offer. They might express some interest, but without being properly educated, they will not be very committed.

By educating them, you get people to realize what's happening in their bodies and what changes would occur if their health became a priority.

One of my patients first came in when she was 42. She was in obvious pain and had a variety of health problems. During her consultation, she mentioned that she felt more like 57. I knew that if I could demonstrate how my treatment program could make her feel youthful again, she would be interested. I didn't tell this patient that I could make her feel 25 again, but that I could make her feel her age again. For this woman, feeling herself was a miracle.

Many people share this mentality. They ignore the pain, thinking it will go away and correct itself on its own. They ignore the problem until the symptoms return, forcing them to face it. That is exactly what this patient did; the key, however, is knowing how to handle it.

I continued with my consultation, and noticing her pain, I asked about her problems. I then asked a series of critical questions. Thereafter, she accepted my promise and committed to care.

The following questions are key to an effective patient consultation. Try utilizing them with your new patients.

1. "How committed are you to getting well?" Do patients view their health as a priority, or does it sit on the back burner? Educate your patients about how the body works, how health problems are caused by *qi* stagnation and/or organ imbalances, and how acupuncture can help. Then they can make a conscious decision about whether to continue care.
2. Ask about your patient's health history. Don't merely give them a form to fill out; ask questions. Pay attention to their responses. Include childhood illnesses throughout the

- patient's life. Don't get stuck on the recent event that resulted in the immediate problem.
3. "Is it possible that these illnesses may have caused imbalances in your body?" Once they see that the body has been affected over and over, and that these events may have changed the balances in their body, they will have a better understanding of why acupuncture is a potential solution. If they have a long history of illness, it will be logical that it will take time to get better. A patient comes in thinking short-term; they want their pain removed and the problem eliminated on that visit. They need to understand that their current health condition took time to develop.
 4. "What other drugs and remedies have you tried?" Make sure they tell you the drugs and remedies they have tried. When you make a person aware of the fact that they tried numerous things to feel better and very little worked, it becomes logical to try something different.
 5. "How old did you think you would be before you would have these health problems?" Reiterate their response by saying, "These problems, these symptoms, are actually making you feel older, is that right?" Then tell them if these health problems are removed they will feel younger, that they could potentially add years onto their life. For your older patients, simply ask them how much better they might feel if they weren't suffering from these health problems.
 6. "How do you now rate your commitment to becoming as healthy as possible, on a scale from one to 10?" I guarantee nearly all of the responses will be a 10. That is how it worked for me. That is how I gave my patient 15 years of life back, and kept my promise.

The initial patient consultation gives you an opportunity to communicate with patients - to shift their perception, to get them to commit to getting well. It can be a battle to make people change, because many people believe the answers to health problems are found in a pill, and only through that pill will they be symptom-free. You can change this perception, but you have to get patients to commit to a care plan.

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