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Editorial Staff

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"NADA Is Really Shooting Itself in the Foot"

Dear Editor:

This letter is in response to the recent article, "Reform Hope Seen In CA 'Little Hoover' Report" in the November 2004 edition of the National Acupuncture Detoxification Association (NADA) publication *Guidepoints*, containing more "good" news for California acupuncturists and/or all acupuncturists working in the United States, which is apparently developing out of the Little Hoover Commission's "findings." I present my concerns as a California licensed acupuncturist. I was also a certified member of NADA. I dropped my membership for two reasons: one, because there has been essentially no work for California acupuncturists in drug treatment, at least in Los Angeles; two, NADA's lobbying efforts for acupuncture detoxification specialist status in California will create further employment problems for fully trained acupuncturists in the state of California.

The NADA protocol was developed by acupuncturists to help treat people with chemical dependency issues. Now NADA states that there is no room for acupuncturists in drug treatment. NADA generally implies that because they have a point selection with a special protocol name that it somehow falls outside the domain of licensed acupuncture in California. This stance presents significant problems for the growth of this profession and is a policy that directly reduces the capacity of the fully trained and licensed acupuncturist to function professionally within this culture. One could ask, if acupuncture treatment has no value in drug treatment, why use the NADA protocol at all? If it does have value, why not pay a reasonable fee for people who are licensed and insured to do it?

This smacks very much like old-fashioned "union busting" to ultimately render LACs as unnecessary in public health care. I believe there is a need for acupuncturists in every phase of public health care; compared to many others, their fees are, in fact, extremely reasonable. For that matter, if low-cost acupuncture in addiction medicine is truly necessary, the acupuncture schools of California are probably capable of providing plenty of interns who would be more than willing to work just for the clinical experience alone. This should more than adequately provide services to the majority of those who are in need and can't afford to render payment for services. Has there really been a serious effort by NADA and/or its agents to approach the general acupuncture community with this problem?

Ultimately, NADA is really shooting itself in the foot by claiming that LACs want too much money to be involved in chemical dependency treatment. They are devaluing their own work by insisting that

people not be paid to do it. Were that to continue, it might not take too much time or thought by other industry insiders to figure out that there is no longer any real need for NADA either; probably there are people in the industry who can already carry on the work of NADA, with feeling. Putting my concern for the future of NADA aside for a moment, one could again ask: if all of those counselors, social workers, etc., who are already being paid by some aspect of the chemical dependency industry are so effective, why then do they also need (or have the time) to be able to do acupuncture in a manner sufficient to the needs of the people who are in such dire need of acupuncture services - the hard-core, recidivist, chemically dependent or addicted person? Because it works and it has value in addiction medicine - so why shouldn't people who have spent the time and money for the full education and licensure in California get a real first chance at the opportunity to provide those services? Can anyone really afford to work for free in California? No. They do it because it will, directly or indirectly, lead to some further development in their life, career, or business. For all the acupuncturists who donated their time to chemical dependency treatment over the years, NADA is saying "thank you" by asking them to step aside and let someone else do the work - someone who won't ask to be paid for it.

A couple of years ago, I would have been happy to have the chance for any work in chemical dependency treatment. While I was still working on my MTOM degree, I interned at Daniel Freeman Hospital's chemical dependency department. We saw very good results with people when we did both full body acupuncture, as well as ear acupuncture (and not always the "protocol"); these were treatment protocols which we, as supervised students of traditional Chinese medicine, were able to fluidly create or decide upon *in situ*. Do those results have no meaning to the drug treatment industry at all? Is there really no room for acupuncturists in the treatment of addiction issues, or is it just the fact that many of the allopathic folks don't want to share the work with anyone else? Furthermore, is the NADA procedure the only way to effectively treat chemical dependency or addiction issues with acupuncture, or are there other equally valuable methods available to a fully educated and licensed acupuncturist to choose from, besides simply the five ear points?

For you personally, or for anyone working hard to bring acupuncture to help people who need treatment, I commend your efforts, I wish you well, and good luck. Obviously this is a very complex time in California, either in drug treatment, in acupuncture, or in the so-called alternative healthcare community as a whole. For NADA, however, I can no longer support their efforts since they in turn won't support the people that got them where they are today: the licensed acupuncturists. Whether for "a good cause" or not, in this case the baby is once again going out with the bath water.

To summarize, with this letter I am formally asking NADA and its agents to cease and desist in their action against California licensed acupuncturists, and requesting that they try to find a way to work within California law, not to circumvent it.

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