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... And a Few Goals of My Own

Michael Devitt

A few days ago,* Marilyn Allen stopped by the office with a giant tray of homemade cookies and seven-layer bars as a Christmas present. Being the generous soul that I am, I sent out a company-wide e-mail letting everyone at MPA know about Marilyn's gift, and offering them a chance to sample the goodies.

Based on how quickly people came into the office after I sent that e-mail, you would think I was handing out \$100 bills instead of chocolate chip cookies. Within seconds, thirty-odd people showed up out of nowhere - and an interesting thing took place. Co-workers who usually spent most of the time at their desk or in a cubicle came into our office and talked - not just about the cookies, but about a movie they'd seen or a CD they'd bought, or about what they were doing for Christmas and New Year's Day. People didn't hoard the cookies to themselves, either; they shared with each other. And, with just a few exceptions, they all said "thank you" on their way out. For a few minutes, the routine of putting a publication together disappeared, and instead of 40 people working for this department or that department, we were one big family. It was a great feeling.

As I said, I like to consider myself a generous soul. (This probably comes from being brought up by a kind and giving mother and grandparents, and the fact that from birth until age 14, I lived directly across the street from a rather imposing iron-and-brick church. But I digress.) In return for Marilyn's act of kindness, I promised her I'd write this month's column. She's earned it. She's worked extremely hard over the last few months, and I figured the least I could do would be to give her a break from yet another deadline. Besides, after reading Marilyn's article about setting goals a couple of issues ago, I had come up with a few of my own, which I thought might interest you.

One of the goals I had set for 2006 was to add some new columnists to *Acupuncture Today*. Many of our columnists have been writing for the publication for several years, and they all do an excellent job. Still, I thought it might be nice to breathe some new life into the publication, and allow people with different perspectives to let their voices heard.

Given the time of year in which we sent out a call for contributing authors, I had only expected to

hear from two or three practitioners. To my great surprise, as of press time, I've received responses from more than a dozen members of the profession. Three of them (Sam Collins, Felice Dunas and Craig Williams) have already had their first articles published in *Acupuncture Today*. JoAnn Tall, president of the Santa Barbara College of Oriental Medicine, and John Donald, an acupuncturist in Washington, are scheduled to debut next month; other columnists will debut in April or May. Having so many people interested in writing for *Acupuncture Today* has given me yet another goal, which is to try and keep everyone on our roster of columnists happy. It's a challenge I look forward to.

Another goal I'd like to see accomplished by the end of 2006, if not sooner, is a redesign of *Acupuncture Today*. Expect some changes in the use of images and the way articles are laid out. Look for those (and other) design elements to be incorporated into *AT* to make the journal look more professional and more readable without taking away the quality of its content. I know we can accomplish this, and I'm sure you'll be happy with the results.

For the acupuncture profession, my goals are a little more lofty. At present, there are still more than a half-dozen states that don't allow for the practice of acupuncture by licensed acupuncturists. As a profession, our goal should be to have that number reduced to zero. I want to see our state and national leaders make more of an effort to have acupuncture licensing laws passed in those states. As *Acupuncture Today's* managing editor, I'll do my part by helping to publicize efforts to get laws passed, and to help generate support for acupuncturists in those states.

I also want to see the acupuncture profession do a better job of protecting itself. By that, I mean that I'd like to see the profession do a better job of fending off other health care providers who want to practice acupuncture with little or no training. In an interview published in the November 2005 issue, Dr. Will Morris, president of the AAOM, said that in terms of being a professional provider of acupuncture and Oriental medicine, "we take as a minimal basis the NCCAOM standards and graduation from an ACAOM accredited or equivalency school." Just as I've pledged to do my part in helping to publicize efforts to get acupuncture laws passed, I will also try to do my best to inform you when other providers are attempting to practice acupuncture without adhering to NCCAOM's or ACAOM's standards.

The third goal I would like to see achieved is greater support for Maurice Hinchey's bill, the Federal Acupuncture Coverage Act. I know we've reported on Mr. Hinchey's bill several times in the past, but I'm not sure you realize how important it is to the future of the profession. If this bill were to pass, it would open acupuncture up to millions of people who currently might not be able to afford care. It would also free up access for acupuncturists to work in hospitals that receive Medicare, and allow for the possibility of training programs and residency programs for acupuncturists in a hospital environment.

Finally, we need to keep seeing more consistent, high-quality acupuncture research. In my opinion, if we can do this, most of the other goals will fall into place. Legislators, I believe, are more likely to introduce pro-acupuncture laws if they're presented with enough evidence that shows acupuncture is safe, effective and cost-effective. They're also more likely to raise the standards for practicing acupuncture by non-acupuncturists if they're presented with enough evidence showing that more training and education either lessens the risk of side-effects or results in more effective care.

Are all of these goals attainable? Yes. Can they be accomplished overnight? No. But if we work together, the acupuncture profession we have at the end of 2006 will be even stronger, more cohesive and more respected than the profession we have now. Let's all do what we can to make this year - and this profession - the best it can be.

** This article was written in mid-December 2005.*

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