

A Change Is Gonna Come

As May begins, I look forward to enjoying the full effects of spring, with all of its wonderful bright-colored flowers and sunny days. Sometimes I also like to look backward; on this occasion, I look back to the Southwest Symposium, which was held in Austin, Texas, in mid-March. The venue - The Crossings, a holistic learning center in the scenic hill country just outside Austin - was beautiful. The sky was a deep, rich blue, with numerous white clouds, and the air was fresh and clear. For those of us in Southern California, where the air was recently ranked second worst in the nation, a few days at The Crossings was a refreshing change indeed.

The lineup of speakers at the Southwest Symposium was impressive. The conference was headlined by Giovanni Maciocia, who thrilled all of those in attendance with his lecture. Mary Elizabeth Wakefield presented a "day of beauty" workshop on constitutional facial acupuncture; I was fortunate enough to be her model for a live demonstration. It always is a thrill to have her work on me, because she is innovative and provides such new and interesting information.

My compliments to the organizers of the Southwest Symposium for putting on such a well-planned show. I recommend that all of you put the symposium on your agenda for next year.

When spring arrives, it tells us that a new beginning is about to take place. The days get longer, and bright colors begin to appear. In the Oriental medicine field, we look at our patients with a new set of eyes for the symptoms they exhibit during this time of year. Our thoughts turn from hibernation to renewal, and we can feel a change in the air.

2006 is a year that has the potential for major changes to take place. While we won't be choosing a new president, 2006 is a year of major elections in this country, with one-third of the U.S. Senate and the entire House of Representatives, up for grabs in November. That means hundreds of people seeking election (or re-election) will soon begin campaigning for your vote - if they haven't already started doing so.

Who will our new elected officials be, and how do they feel about Oriental medicine? Better yet, how will they find out about all of the great things Oriental medicine has to offer? Our profession doesn't have a national media campaign; we have only a few full-time lobbyists scattered throughout the country; and we don't have the financial resources of Big Medicine or Big Pharma. (I don't imagine, for instance, that we'll have a representative from any of the major drug companies get on national TV and tell the public to start seeing an acupuncturist for pain relief instead of downing a couple of pills any time soon.)

If we want the people who represent us in government to know about the benefits of acupuncture and Oriental medicine, the burden of providing that information ultimately falls on us, the practitioners, students, vendors, educators and others who really know what Oriental medicine can do, and the value it delivers to millions of people across the U.S. Nobody's going to do it for us. We must educate them, one by one, if necessary.

We also have to present a united front. Let's face it: There still is a lot of divisiveness in this

profession. When we go out and try to educate the public and our elected officials, we need to set our differences aside and present a unified message. I have seen the AAOM and the AOM Alliance come together on certain issues and work together to have pro-acupuncture laws passed, and to have negative laws tabled or voted down. Would those things have happened if the AAOM and the Alliance presented opposing points of view?

That said, I recognize there are times where it's advantageous to bring in people from outside the AOM arena to help us move forward. Many of the people practicing acupuncture in the U.S. have come from other health care fields; for them, acupuncture is a second career. These people can be quite valuable in helping us in the pursuit of professional recognition and regulation. They can give insight and a different perspective that a person who has studied only acupuncture and Oriental medicine might not be able to provide.

We need everyone in this profession - practitioners, students, schools and school administrators, teachers, patients and advocates - to join in and help us achieve the respect we deserve. We cannot win this battle alone ... but we can win.

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