

Getting Healthy in the Year of the Rat

Marilyn Allen, Editor at Large

Welcome to 2008, the Year of the Rat. The past year has been filled with surprises and many new adventures. A great big THANK YOU goes out to the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine for the role it played in the American Public Health Association conference in Washington, D.C. Also, thanks to the many speakers who talked about acupuncture and Oriental medicine in a number of the sessions throughout the conference.

This conference focused on every imaginable facet of health in the United States. The former Surgeon General of the United States said, "Health care matters to all of us some of the time, public health matters to all of us all of the time." This seems to sum it up in a few well-chosen words. Public health has an impact on all of us around the world.

Public health is concerned with threats to the overall health of a community based on population health analysis. Health is defined and promoted differently by many organizations. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as: "A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."

The WHO plays a major role in public health worldwide. This is one of the factors that has helped with the standardization of acupuncture point location and terminologies. These two accomplishments are leading to the establishment of International Classification of Disease codes for the Oriental medicine profession. The WHO also is promoting socioeconomic progress in countries around the world so more resources are invested in health procedures and interventions. WHO works to insure health- security issues such as outbreaks of epidemic-prone diseases. We in the United States do not usually spend much time or energy on epidemic-prone diseases. We, for the most part, have an adequate supply of clean and safe conditions. These include water, shelter and health issues.

I was invited by Mina Larson, marketing director of the National Certification Commission of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, to join her in presenting acupuncture and Oriental medicine to the American Public Health Association. This is part of the ongoing public relations campaign that is being conducted by NCCAOM. It has been working for more than a year to help inform the population of the healing benefits of acupuncture and Oriental medicine. Mina arranged for booth space and various forms of information about certification that leads to the licensure for Oriental medicine professionals in the United States. I took hundreds of copies of *Acupuncture Today* and the *Acupuncture Answer Book*. We had more than 20 feet of booth space and greeted attendees and gave out information to hundreds of people. The attendees asked questions from, "Does it hurt?" to "Who can you refer me to in my area?" Mina suggested looking on the NCCAOM Web site, but we quickly learned that people do not want to just look on a Web site, as it is like looking in a phone book. They wanted someone who had been personally recommended. This reminded me that it takes three things for a referral. The person referring must know you personally or your reputation. Next, they must believe that the procedure or intervention that you are going to use will help the person they are referring. And last, they must trust you. So it is each of our responsibility to become known in our respective communities.

The booth was busy every day of the conference. We met attendees from all over the U.S., as well as from many other countries. The attendees included doctors, nurses and heads of many public health agencies and training institutions. Public health includes the categories of epidemiology, statistics and health services. Research is a major thrust of public health. I was amazed to see how people conduct research. Environmental health, social health, behavioral health and occupational health also are part of public health.

Public health focuses on preventing disease. It took me just a few moments to realize this is a perfect fit for acupuncture and Oriental medicine - prevention rather than treating at the end of the disease process. Each acupuncturist, in their own way, is educating their patients as to the healing benefits of acupuncture treatments and how to stay fit and healthy. Our goal is for patients to make healthy choices for their lifestyle.

This year, let's take the opportunities to improve our own health, the health of our families and loved ones, and the health of our communities. Let's work together to help improve the health of our nation and in turn, the health of our global community. Everyone deserves the gift of good health and the acupuncture and Oriental medicine providers have the tools to make this possible.

Mark your calendars now! Next year's annual American Public Health Association meeting will be held in San Diego, Oct. 25-29, 2008. The theme will be "Public Health without Borders." As an added bonus, the American Public Health Association will be teaming up with the Pacific College of Oriental Medicine to bring yet another year of great lectures and learning opportunities. For more general information about the American Public Health Association, please visit: www.apha.org.

JANUARY 2008