

Active Liberty

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I just saw an interview with Justice Stephen Breyer of the U.S. Supreme Court. He spoke about the idea of "active liberty." The phrase conjures up the word *activist*, which according to *Webster's New World Dictionary* derives from the word *activism*. It means "the taking of direct action to achieve a political or social end." We think about an activist as one who possibly "demonstrates on political issues." The term is mostly connected to those who submit bills to Congress or who march along Capitol Hill for a few days. Many of these activists have made great marks in U.S. history. Some have been for the better and some have been for the worse, but the point is they did something because of what they believed in.

I often ask students, "Is there anyone who likes politics?" Sometimes, one hand will go up. This is sadly the world we are creating and the lesson we are teaching the youth of today. With the constant media bashing of politics and the never-ending drama of the current presidential campaign, "politics" has come to have a negative connotation. People do not want to be involved in the arena because it usually means getting your hands a little dirty.

This is not always the case. Being an activist for certain issues about which you feel passionate is never a bad thing. It does not mean you have to pick a political side and stay with it. This does not even mean you have to throw your hat into the political arena. Breyer expanded on this: "Active liberty is much more than just politics. It is what has made this country great. It is the idea of personal involvement in something, an idea, and activity, an organization, which will make this a better place to live and practice."

Active liberty is derived from the pure foundations on which our forefathers built this great country. A few men who were nothing out of the ordinary came together in common ideas and thoughts. However, participating and becoming a part of things does not necessarily mean you have to know someone important in Washington, D.C., to obtain a voice. It could mean joining a service club, joining the AAAOM, joining a state association, or coaching or supporting a sports team. Choose to associate yourself with organizations that uphold the standards in which you believe. By doing this, your voice will be heard through the services you provide.

Just as the NCCAOM led the cause to get acupuncture recognized as a profession by the U.S. Department of Labor, each one of us must become active in the pursuit of the liberty we have to practice this medicine. We must reach out and touch others, one by one, to build a place for acupuncture and Oriental medicine. Much of people's initial hesitation and hostility toward this medicine is simply due to lack of information and knowledge. In general, people have a natural tendency to shy away from the unknown. The unknown is deemed scary, unsafe and not worth the risk. But if we use our knowledge of this great medicine and become activists for it, the barriers currently holding us back will begin to crumble.

All of the groups and organizations within this profession have a role to play and a place to fill. The mission of protecting Oriental medicine and making sure it is available to all U.S. citizens is paramount. Breyer states, "I say 'active liberty' because I want to stress that democracy works if,

and only if, the average citizen participates." In order to keep this country moving in a positive direction, you need to step out and make a change.

I would like to personally thank the NCCAOM for its unwavering dedication in having acupuncture recognized as a profession by the U.S. Department of Labor. The commission has been relentless in gathering letters and information from practitioners and other lobbyists of this medicine to send to our nation's capital. We can only hope these letters will be greeted with a positive response. However, regardless of the outcome, we are very grateful to the NCCAOM in helping move this practice of medicine in the right direction.

This is a huge step for you as a practitioner. I urge you to take this opportunity that has been given to you and run with it. Now is the time to take action. Recognize your strengths, capitalize on them and spread the information of this medicine to the citizens of the United States, so they can experience a new level of good health.

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