

NCCAM Meeting, Board Elections, Occupational Codes and More

Corinne Axelrod, MPH, LAc, Dipl. Ac.

Greetings! We hope that you are finding these columns useful in keeping up to date on the activities of the American Association of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (AAAOM). We are your professional association, and here are some of the highlights of our recent activities and upcoming conference.

Meeting With NCCAM

The AAAOM was invited by the director of the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), Josephine Briggs, MD, to meet with her and other senior NCCAM staff to discuss research opportunities and research issues specific to the AOM profession. NCCAM is part of the National Institutes of Health, the federal government's lead agency for scientific research and one of the most respected and influential research institutions in the world. The NCCAM appropriation for 2008 was \$121 million for research and training in complementary and alternative medicine, which includes acupuncture and Oriental medicine.

Attending on behalf of the AAAOM was President Martin Herbkersman, Research Chair Misha Cohen, *The American Acupuncturist* Editor-in-Chief Adam Burke, Education and Credentialing Chair William Morris and Executive Director Rebekah Christensen. Some of the topics discussed were adequate representation on the NCCAM Advisory Board; development of research literacy and competency among licensed acupuncturists; herbal research; multicenter, whole-systems research initiatives; inclusion of qualified licensed acupuncturists on research teams, and reviewer and advisory panels; practice-based research; evaluation of multiple delivery models (community and private); AOM's impact on lifestyle and behavior change; and expansion of international research.

This meeting was the first of a series of conversations with the NCCAM on issues important to the AOM profession. A full report of this meeting will be published in the Fall 2008 issue of *The American Acupuncturist*. In the meantime, be sure to meet Dr. Briggs at the AAAOM Annual Conference in Chicago Oct. 16-19. She will be a keynote speaker and will spend time meeting with conference attendees and leaders from the AOM community to discuss NCCAM research opportunities and training for the AOM profession. This is an opportunity not to be missed.

Board Elections

In the August issue of *AT*, we reported that online electronic voting would be available for this year's annual election of board of directors. Unfortunately, the system could not be implemented and tested in time for the October election. However, we will have electronic voting in Chicago at the conference on Oct. 18 that will be similar to the Conexus process, which we have used in the past for garnering input from conference attendees. Each member will have an individual hand-held machine, and votes will be counted instantly. We expect to have an online voting system fully implemented at our next election, which will be held in April 2009 as the AAAOM moves to a new

conference and elections schedule.

Board Candidates

By the time you read this, the nominations period for new AAAOM Board of Directors will have closed and information on the candidates will have been posted on the AAAOM Web site. Be sure to read the candidates' statements and cast your vote at the annual election. If you will not be attending the conference in Chicago, please let your state AOM association know who you would like to see on the Board. The Board of Directors is responsible for setting the policy and direction of the association, so please look at the candidates and select who you want to lead your association. Please choose carefully, and remember to vote.

Standard Occupational Codes

The AAAOM has joined with the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM), the Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (ACAOM), and other AOM organizations in requesting that the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics include acupuncture as a separate and distinct profession in the Standard Occupational Classification Manual. In the letter that was sent to the BLS, we strongly recommended that the manual be updated to include *acupuncture* and *acupuncturists* in the occupational titles and listings in order to reflect the independence and importance of AOM practitioners in the United States.

In our letter we stated, "AOM is rapidly becoming an integral part of our national health care system. It is essential that accurate data is available on the training, supply and distribution of these practitioners to adequately address our nation's health care needs. As the public seeks our services in growing numbers, this code would help to distinguish ourselves in the marketplace."

We went on to request that the next Department of Labor's *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, which will be published in 2010, include a separate code for acupuncturists. Along with the NCCAOM, the ACAOM and other AOM organizations, we will continue our efforts to include *acupuncture* and *acupuncturists* as a separate and distinct profession in the *Standard Occupational Classification Manual*.

Concluding Thought

For the past six years, I have been on the board of directors, first with the AOM Alliance and then with the AAAOM. As an alliance board member, I worked closely with a small group from the AAAOM to set the stage for our unification. As vice president of the AAAOM, I have been working with other board members to help our association be more effective in our efforts to promote the profession, support our practitioners and increase access to AOM services throughout the country. I am very proud of the progress we have made, yet also am very aware of how far we have to go.

There are many issues that are still unresolved, such as: the role of specialty boards in our profession, reimbursement opportunities, herbal medicine protection, and the use of acupuncture or acupuncture needles by other health care professionals, just to name a few. What are your priorities? As the national professional association, we are here to respond to the needs of the profession and provide direction on these and other important issues. The strength of an organization is in its membership, and only with your participation can we achieve our goals. Thanks to all of you who have given so much of your time, and I welcome the rest of you to join with us and help keep the profession strong.

