

## Experiencing Family

Joseph Wollen

*Family* is a powerful word I have learned a lot about since beginning Chinese medicine school, believe it or not. As I prepare for my final semesters, I cannot help but look back at the past four years and think of all that I have been through. There were difficult times, frustrating times, and good and bad times - of course, everything you would expect from life. Usually you have your family to support you through such times, but I moved away from most of my family to attend school, so I quickly learned the value of the friendship of my fellow students. I appreciated how they were there for me, always willing to listen and often experiencing the same feelings. Although, as I look back, I quickly realize one simple thing - all of them have become family.

Now, we all have our biological family, of course. Although I never considered it until now, many of us also have a "student family." I am grateful for all of the new family members I have met at TCM school, and I am excited to share the new paths that our lives will take us down. I know that I will never forget how we all worked so hard together for a common goal. Nor will I forget all the times they carried me through the difficult finals, or gave me guidance and wisdom in TCM. I will definitely never forget how they were there to listen during one of the most difficult times I experienced as a TCM student, when my mentor passed away. They were there to listen to my grief, they were there to support me at my weakest of moments, and they were there to listen when I spoke about him.

Obviously, I am not saying your biological family or legal family cannot be there for you. What I am saying is, don't be so quick to forget about the people who are there in the trenches with you, for they can often *empathize*, whereas others can only *sympathize*. Whether you are currently in TCM school or are now in practice, you will find (or have already found) that your school family is just as dear as any other you know. They may be future business partners, mentors or teachers in areas you lack in, or maybe even people you will be with until the end of your days.

If you open yourself up to this experience, you will find that you begin to develop new levels of compassion with everyone you encounter. You will begin to empathize when they experience loss, sadness, fear, joy, excitement and love. I have experienced all these things with my fellow classmates, getting to know them on deeper levels and in more intimate ways. Some may feel this makes you vulnerable, when in reality it makes you a stronger practitioner.

I can still remember the day I was sitting with my mentor in his office. He had been treating a patient for severe nerve pain. The burning pain went right up the patient's throat to the base of their tongue. Western medicine had no idea what it was and began to think it was "all in their mind." My mentor, however, did not buy that and tried numerous methods to help the pain go away.

He tried using the usual points for *yang ming* heat, stomach fire, draining

heat, etc. He tried auricular, *qigong* and color therapy. He tried something new with each treatment because nothing ever seemed to relieve the pain. Then one day, he decided to give electronic stimulation on the ear and use an anesthesia technique he had learned in China. He told

me, "I have no idea if this will work, but I am running out of options."

He did the treatment, with no immediate effects. However, when the patient came back a week later, they reported they had been pain-free for two hours after the treatment. My mentor said, "Ah, we are on to something!" He then continued with the same treatment. By the following week, the pain had been gone for three days. As the patient arrived for the third anesthesia treatment, they reported they had been pain-free for the whole week.

This was when I saw the most amazing thing: My mentor began to break down and cry. He began to cry with the patient, as he was so happy that the patient had received relief. The patient had never had any relief for nearly two years with this condition. It was at this moment that I realized the true power of compassion. I realized that my mentor had treated all his patients as family members. Because of that, he would never give up and would do everything he could to help them. This would sometimes lead to these moments where he would be so overjoyed that he would cry with them and share their elation.

For many of you, your fellow students have or will become close like this and, like my mentor, you may even allow your patients to become family. This is one of the most beautiful and wonderful things about our medicine. We don't look at the patient as their disease, but we look at them as human beings - human beings with problems that we could very well face sometime in our own life. We then develop a deeper level of compassion and understanding, something too many people in this day and age do not experience.

So, if you are a beginning or current student, I encourage you to open yourself up to your new family - your TCM family - and experience what they have to offer. If you are already in practice, I hope you remember those with whom you attended school and treat them as your family. In the long run, it will make you a better practitioner and give you a deeper understanding of yourself. There will be times when you have to share your frustrations with classmates. You may have to share loss or you may share great joy. Regardless of what you share, experience it, live it and learn from it.

Thank you all for reading my articles, I wish you nothing but the best in your future endeavors and look forward to having you all as colleagues.

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