

AOM in U.S. Health Care Reform

AAAOM Staff

Cynthia O'Donnell, MA, AP, serves as the founder and CEO of East West College of Natural Medicine and is the founder and director of Florida College of Integrative Health. Currently she serves as the chair of AAAOM NGA committee. Deborah Lincoln, RN, MSN, RAc (NCCAOM), is president of the AAAOM, and president emeritus of the Michigan Association of Oriental Medicine. Deborah's extensive education in Western and Chinese medicine spans more than 39 years. She has been in private practice in acupuncture, Chinese herbs, and Oriental medicine for more than 26 years in Lansing, Michigan.

This is the time for us to collectively take a stand concerning the American mainstream health care delivery system. It is time to let Washington, D.C. know about the growth of our profession in the United States. Today, more than ever, Americans are aware of acupuncture and Oriental medicine as a viable and effective health care option.

AAAOM's National Government Affairs (NGA) committee has taken an extremely active role to create a presence for acupuncture and Oriental medicine in Washington, D.C. The NGA committee membership includes experienced leaders from our field who are working to actively represent our profession on many fronts. On our Web site at www.aaaomonline.org, under "Meet the Board," you can view all members of the committee.

The NGA mission is: to create fair public access to AOM; to have acupuncture included in the U.S. health care delivery system; and to protect AOM scope of practice for the licensed practitioner. On Jan. 21, 2009, NGA Chair Cynthia O'Donnell met with U.S. Congressional Representative Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) and his health staffer, Erica Conway, to again request his sponsorship of the acupuncture coverage bill in the 111th Congress. Two days later, he sponsored H.R. 646. To get more information about this bill and how to support its process through Congress, please visit the AAAOM Web site. From our homepage, you will find the Washington Watch Web site, where a poll on H.R. 646 is continuously updated.

This bill brings up critical issues in our field. While some practitioners are not interested in third-party reimbursement or Medi-care, a three-year polling of AAOM and AAAOM membership revealed third-party reimbursement rated as a top three priority. There are members who would like the freedom to pursue a third-party reimbursement practice. AAAOM believes that greater patient access to AOM and practitioners' right to choose all medical business models guides our NGA mission resolutions.

H.R. 646 is the only piece of legislation that specifically mentions acupuncture. This is a travesty because the list of AAAOM legislative goals is comprehensive. Our legislative goals for 2009 include: support and lobby for third-party reimbursement; secure and advance the practice of herbs; aid in state legislative lobbying and reform efforts; support loan forgiveness for acupuncture education; lobby to include AOM in universal health care initiatives; and lobby for AOM inclusion in veterans' affairs coverage.

In February 2009, Sens. Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) co-chaired a hearing entitled "Integrative Care: A Pathway to a Healthier Nation," to kick off a week of activity on the topic in Washington, D.C. The Institute of Medicine (IOM), in partnership with the Bravewell Collaborative, held a three-day conference entitled "Summit on Integrative Medicine and the Health of the Public Agenda" to discuss the practice of and research in integrative medicine.

Will Morris, NGA committee and AAAOM board member attended the conference and reported to the AAAOM Board: "There seems to be a change in the weather in terms of health care. President Obama announced a commitment to health reform with budget-ary support the night before the summit. These changes are significant. There has been a shift of attention on integrative medicine from conversations taking place mainly at the National Center for Alternative and Complementary Medicine (NCCAM), to a conversation that is at the forefront of IOM work. Many dimensions of integrative medicine were brought forward during the three day conference."

Acupuncture was addressed in a very favorable light by many of the speakers and panelists. Conditions appear to be favorable for al-ied professions in general and acupuncture in particular. In the words of Senator Harkin:"Our time has come."

This year, President Obama has mandated health care reform, where he stated that America "cannot, must not, and will not wait on health care reform." Our medicine needs to be included. It also behooves the thousands of currently enrolled AOM students to support the efforts of the NGA's mission to create practice options through coverage by third-party reimbursement systems, whether it is Medicare, universal health care reform, or veterans' coverage for acupuncture. Our fundraising committee has been working jointly with NGA to create and accomplish effective fundraising strategies. Donations can be made at www.aaaomonline.com/paf.

On another front, the AAAOM is pleased to provide an update on its ongoing efforts with the Coalition for Patients' Rights (CPR). As a member, the collaborative force of the CPR integrates the efforts of 36 organizations representing more than three million licensed health care professionals. CPR is committed to advocating for the practice rights of its members for the sake of their patients who rely on them for the many and varied services they provide. The CPR was established in 2006 in response to divisive efforts by the American Medical Association and other groups representing organized medicine to limit other health care providers' scope of prac-tice.

In the face of ongoing efforts by organized medicine to limit the critical role of health care providers who are not MDs or DOs, the CPR affirms it is essential that consumers be educated about their rights and about the unnecessary burden these limitations will place on millions of patients, especially those in rural and medically underserved areas. The CPR is committed to advocating for the prac-tice rights of its members for the sake of their patients who rely on them for the many and varied services they provide. The coalition is dedicated to protecting patients' rights to access quality care from trained professionals. As the activities with the CPR progress, updates will be provided. For more information, please visit www.patientsrightscoalition.org.

For more information on all campaign efforts, please visit www.aaaomonline.org, under US Healthcare Reform. For further questions, you may contact the AAAOM office at (866) 455-7999.

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