

Researchers DO Get It

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After reading "Is Most of Acupuncture Research a Sham?" in the August 2009 issue, I feel compelled to respond. I was disappointed in the emotional tone of Dr. Amaro's article. Instead of the article being a scholarly critique of the study's design flaws and offering suggestions for improvement, it sounded like complaining about how Western researchers "don't get it." I see this same reaction among my peers in the research course at my school. While I strongly believe in the role of vigorous debate and constructive criticism to push research to the highest level, I think the overall negative attitude towards Western medical institutions doing this type of research hinders our field more than it helps.

My 10-year experience coordinating NIH-funded research studies at a major state university and completion an advanced degree in public health, epidemiology and biostatistics before pursuing my education in traditional Chinese medicine gives me first-hand knowledge of the inside world of how research is conducted. These researchers take their roles seriously and have good intentions in their efforts. Dr. Amaro's accusation of the researchers being "guilty of the highest malfeasance" is offensive, careless and unprofessional.

Chinese medicine is in the middle of a momentous shift in the United States. For better or worse, more people are taking notice and are curious about how it works. We may have valid concerns with the application of standard biomedical methods of research to the arena of Chinese medicine, but we're not going to change things by sitting back and criticizing the work. Don't get me wrong. I see a lot of problems too, but the solution is not easy. There are limitations to study designs, and one study can never give the definitive answer. You cannot design a perfect study. That's why studies build upon each other.

If Western-trained researchers "don't get it," then we as a field should do something about it. We should take a leadership role, reach out, educate them, develop ongoing relationships, join their research teams as consultants and help them figure out what different research models are appropriate. Moreover, we in Chinese medicine should pursue training in Western biomedical research so we can understand their side too. Let's work in partnership towards a common goal. Come on. We in this field know emotional agitation creates stagnation. It doesn't lead to free flow and harmony.

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