

At the Table With the Council of Colleges

Valerie Hobbs, Dipl. Ac., Dipl. CH, LAc

I remember attending my first meeting of the [Council of Colleges of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine \(CCAOM\)](#) in 1999. As a newly hired college administrator, I chose to sit in a corner and try to blend into the background. I'm not really good at background-blending, and I found myself captivated by a meeting process that has contributed so substantially to the respected professional status for the medicine I love. When I reflect that this respect has been garnered in the shortest period of time for any profession in US history, I am even more cognizant at how uncharted and remarkable this gain has been.

Sometimes when one looks about and wonders where it is we need to go, it is important to remember how far we have come and how fast. When the CCAOM adopted a strategic plan goal to provide the profession with articles about the activities of the Council, I was moved to write about my experiences. This article is from my personal viewpoint, and as such does not reflect a position on the part of the CCAOM. In writing from my own viewpoint, my intent is to provide a window into what some might perceive as a remote ivory tower of academia. My experience and the contribution the Council makes to our profession, however, are anything but remote.

When I first sat down at the CCAOM table in 1999, I did not know what a difference being part of the Council would make to me as a practitioner and a college administrator. What I have come to realize is that in order to move forward most effectively as a profession, we need to proceed from a position of cooperation, intention, and strength. It is very like an approach to treatment: as a practitioner, I bring the "individual interests" of the organs and substances to a treatment session by analyzing how they are working together and determining what resources are available, and then take directed and deliberate steps to affect a positive outcome. While the organizations that represent us have come together on specified tasks in the past, there is renewed energy by the AOM national organizations at this time to explore their collective strategic options. I think that in a profession that does have different viewpoints, the intention of these organizations to articulate common goals may just provide us with the impetus to promote some very timely and beneficial changes.

Within the Council, there are several current and important issues being addressed by committees that meet twice a year and work electronically during the rest of the year. As you might imagine from a group of colleges, curriculum issues and educational standards have been a long-standing focus. The current Master degree standards for acupuncture, Oriental medicine and Chinese herbology and the postgraduate DAOM standards have been greatly impacted by the work of the Council's curriculum-oriented committees. The current agenda of the Core Curriculum Committee is to review the work of ACAOM's Doctoral Task Force and to make recommendations to ACAOM concerning the first-professional doctoral standards developed by that task force. Whether the profession should move to an entry-level doctorate is a subject of much debate and can only be decided by all stakeholders in the profession. If such a transition occurs, it should be developed with studied and careful deliberation by the experts in the delivery of AOM education.

The Council's Entry-Level Standards Committee has been working on a number of non-curricular

issues that inevitably arise in considering a change in entry-level standards. Part of the committee's work has been to survey the profession to determine the extent of support for a first-professional doctorate, review how state educational authorities will view such a change, document the off-site clinical work performed by the Council's member colleges, support training for faculty at the doctoral level and develop resources for AOM college administrators.

The differing opinions on an entry-level standard have been well represented in every Council meeting I have attended. What I find remarkable about the process is the depth of the members' commitment to hearing all the viewpoints, their dedication to basing any change to existing standards on those that can meet U.S. Department of Education criteria, and their desire to maintain the diversity of acupuncture traditions that exist in our field. At the heart of all the discussion about entry-level standards is the reality of knowing that excellence in educational standards leads to excellence in the delivery of patient care. Ultimately, it is the encounter between each patient with a practitioner who has met a high academic standard that makes our practitioners the experts in this modern incarnation of a long practiced medicine.

Other Council committees are also quite active. In response to FDA's adoption of current Good Manufacturing Practices (cGMP) regulations governing the compounding of herbal supplements, the Herbal Committee is currently reviewing the impact these federal rules may have on our educational institutions where Chinese herbology is part of the curriculum. This effort has involved seeking expert opinion, holding workshops and exploring best practices for institutions that have herbal dispensaries. In many ways, the impact of these rules on our institutions may significantly affect how our medicine is taught and practiced.

The Council's Marketing Committee is focused not only on how our profession is perceived by the public, but also in placing AOM education on an equal footing within other health care professional forums in the U.S. Through the committee's work, the Council has recently become a member of the Advisory Council for the National Association of Advisors for the Health Professions (NAAHP). The NAAHP is the organization specifically dedicated to educating college advisors on career opportunities in various health professions. As a patron member of NAAHP, and now a member of its Advisory Council, the CCAOM fully joins other major health care professions with an opportunity to promote the AOM profession and careers. Imagine what it might have been like for you if career counseling in a health profession in your undergraduate college had included information on an acupuncture career.

The Council's membership in the Academic Consortium for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (ACCAHC) provides an excellent opportunity for monitoring and influencing developments in the larger field of CAM. The Council's immediate past president, [Elizabeth Goldblatt](#), is chair of the Consortium and played a major role for AOM and CAM by her participation on the Conference Planning Committee for the Institute of Medicine (IOM) National Summit on Integrative Medicine and the Public Health, held last February. Dr. Goldblatt was instrumental in ensuring that CAM and AOM providers were involved in many of the background papers and presentations at this major national summit. Such events may sound like something irrelevant to the treatment room, but AOM representation in these forums greatly promotes national and general public recognition of our profession and serves to define who we are and what we do.

Finally, my participation in the Council has heightened my awareness of the benefit of the collective knowledge and expertise that is available at CCAOM general business meetings and other events at the Council's semi-annual conferences. The CCAOM holds regular trainings at these meetings for its member colleges on a wide variety of topics designed to assist and deepen the expertise of college administrators and faculty.

Our profession has developed from an essentially apprenticeship-model of education to formally accredited education and national certification, and now its leaders are actively planning and participating in national conferences with other conventional and CAM providers at the Institute of Medicine. This evolution has taken dedication, vision and talent by many people in the AOM profession.

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