

AOM Riding a Cultural Wave

Marilyn Allen, Editor at Large

On a recent beautiful weekend in the state of Texas, several hundred licensed acupuncturists gathered together for a time of education and renewing of friendships at the Southwest Symposium. ([Read more about the Symposium](#)). It highlighted that Oriental medicine practitioners in Texas are on the move, and the practice has taken a giant step toward professionalism. The Texas Association of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine has hired a new executive director, Tim Weitz.

Weitz is a founding partner of the Austin-based law firm McDonald, Mackay & Weitz, L.L.P. Licensed in Texas since 1986. He has worked as an attorney in both the public and private sectors. His background includes both criminal defense and criminal prosecution as a judge advocate in the U.S. Marine Corps. He has private practice experience in a wide range of general civil matters and has been a frequent speaker on a variety of health-law related topics, grassroots lobbying and professionalism.

Before returning to private practice in 1996, he served as the General Counsel for the Texas State Board of Medical Examiners, now known simply as the Texas Medical Board (TMB) and provided similar legal services to the Texas State Board of Acupuncture Examiners and the Texas State Board of Physician Assistant Examiners. He is board-certified in administrative law by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization, and his current practice focuses primarily on physician licensure defense, health law, general administrative law and professional licensing for health care providers.

In addition to six years of experience in state government, he has also been employed as a registered lobbyist on health care legislation. Weitz is certified as an association executive by the American Society of Association Executives and is often involved in projects for nonprofit associations in the health care field.

Weitz recently spoke at a luncheon and gave a challenging speech to the profession. With his background and knowledge of the inner workings of professional associations and regulatory bodies, he shared his thoughts as to what the acupuncture profession needs to do and where it needs to go.

He explained that to survive in the evolving medical community, the acupuncture profession needs to do several things. The profession needs to unify and consolidate the various local or regional acupuncture groups into one formidable organization in each state and at the national level. There must be a cultural shift such that there is an expectation that being an acupuncturist means being involved in a professional association. That shift must include the student population as well as the old guard of veteran practitioners. There needs to be further development of grassroots advocacy on matters of importance ranging from scope of practice to reimbursement. Lobbyists and association leaders are ineffective without the strength and backing of the majority of the licensed community of professionals. Acupuncturists have to find the time to be involved in establishing relationships with insurance carriers, legislators, and regulators.

We need to carry forward this cultural shift about which Weitz spoke. To increase public awareness and a vocal demand for better access to care, each acupuncturist must take on the individual responsibility to be an ambassador for the profession, whether at the state capitol or standing in line at the grocery store. In short, the acupuncture community needs to unify, organize grassroots advocacy at every level, and take every opportunity to continually educate the public about the benefits of acupuncture and the barriers that exist to patient access.

This year is an election year. If you read the top story in *Acupuncture Today* this month, you will meet an acupuncturist who is taking things to the next level by running for state government. You can do your part, just as David Molony is doing. It is time to get involved. Join your state or national association. Educate the public. Represent your profession with pride. All of this will surge the cultural wave Weitz spoke of.

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