

## Now Is The Time

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It's that time of the year again - election time. Both state and national elections are in November this year. You have an opportunity to get involved and become a part of helping the profession of acupuncture grow and position itself within the political arena.

I have been asking my classes at the acupuncture schools which one of the students, if any like politics. There may be one or two in each class that respond favorably to the topic of politics. The reality is many issues affecting the profession involve the political arena.

Many state associations are finding out that there are issues within their state elected bodies that have to do with issues about the profession. They may have either a positive or negative effect on acupuncture professionals within each state. Sometimes it is not just about legislation that would help the profession, but it may be issues that could hurt or impact the profession negatively. One issue that is facing several states is that of dry needling. Look into the issue in your state. Look at your state association and become a member if you do not already belong to one. We all are in this together and must work together for the advancement of the profession in this country.

How do you begin? The process can be interesting and fun. The action steps will involve time, but not money. There are three elected officials or at this time they may be only candidates that are necessary to meet. Each one of these people has a local office within your city or a neighboring town. It is important for you to know your state legislators within their own respective districts. It is necessary to communicate with them at the capitol, but it is more important to build the relationship within your own districts. This is where you live and work and they represent you and your views. You want to find out if the elected official or the candidate supports acupuncture. This is important because their vote is necessary to get legislation passed or stopped depending on how it will affect your profession.

Another important factor is to educate the legislators and their staffs. This should be slowly in little sound bites. You can also volunteer to work in their campaign by stuffing envelopes, sending out mailers, making lawn signs and calling to "get out the vote."

Make sure that when you are at their campaign headquarters talk to the other volunteers. Share your thoughts about your medicine and how it fits into the Obama's new healthcare plan and other state health plans. You will find that building a relationship is not a fast process. It is similar to working with a patient and educating them so they can refer you to others. Your mission will be two-fold: You are helping them in their campaign and you are educating them.

You can also volunteer to work at a fundraising event. Please remember that everyone at the event is a potential patient and that they can afford the care. If you do not want to meet the legislator or potential legislator alone, find a colleague from the same zip code and go together. Call first to make an appointment with the legislator. Have some basic material ready in a communication packet with your contact information included.

You may also call the State Assembly legislator, the State Senator, the National Congress person and the National Senator.

You will find that the staffers who answer the phone will be very helpful. Introduce yourself, be polite and start a conversation with them or ask for the administrator in charge of healthcare and find out what they know about acupuncture and Oriental Medicine. These people are very knowledgeable and have very good suggestions and are usually very willing to help you.

These are some suggestions for beginning to build a professional relationship with an elected official. This method of getting to know the people - who represent you in your state and in the nation's capitol - does not require a large monetary donation. Most of the time the state legislators are looking for information and want to communicate with people who are interested in a specific piece of legislation.

There are a number of legislative issues that are being presented to them throughout the United States in individual states. Obama's new healthcare plan is an issue which will become important in each state as to whether acupuncture services will be a covered service or not. Other issues such as dry needling, scope of practice, herbs, and insurance coverage are also being considered.

It is necessary for the professional to stand up and be counted. Each acupuncturist is needed for this campaign. We need your energy, your *Jing*, your ideas and your individual efforts. You can be a part of this process. No effort is too small and every visit, phone call and letter sent to a legislator is a step in the right direction toward the recognition of this healthcare profession in each state and the nation. Former President Abraham Lincoln once said, "Together we stand, divided we fall."

We are doing this for the profession and for the citizens of the United States that we serve both now and in the future. They deserve to be able to choose this method of treatment in their journey of healthcare.

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