



GENERAL ACUPUNCTURE

## Annual AOBTA Gathering Offers A Range of Perspectives

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Compact. Interactive. Engaging, Instructive. Practical. Mystical and fun. These were the words the 60-plus attendees of AOBTA who gathered in mid May used to describe the annual gathering. The weekend conference featured a series of meetings and workshops. Dubbed as a retreat rather than a formal convention, the retreat was held in the conference corner of the Crystal City Crowne Plaza hotel in Washington, D.C.

All workshops were taught or facilitated by past and current AOBTA board members who donated their time and talents. Topics addressed a range of practical, esoteric, ethical, and high tech issues related to individual ABT practice and ABT schools.

As an attendee, I would like to share a recap of the event and the interesting topics that were discussed.

The Workshops



For those grappling with spiritual guidance in ABT, there was great insights and experiences to learn from AOBTA® Legislative Director Deborah Overholt. Overholt shared her experiences with shamanism to inspire a lively discussion on the meaning of spiritual guides, and how to access them through meditation and daily practice.

Others like Deborah Valentine Smith, AOBTA® Director of Communications, and ABT instructor for over 30 years, focused on working with intention rather than force to move *qi* and Blood through adhesions, scars and blockages. In the "Tendino-Muscular Meridians for Fibromyalgia & Cellulite" workshop she helped participants develop increased sensitivity to resistance in the fascia, and how to stretch without pulling while holding relevant acu-points. Her workshop segued into my tips on circulating energy through scars like an imaginary rota roter, by holding points at either end. In her workshop titled "Drawing Circles: Breast Health/Breast Cancer," I also taught a series of simple, effective *qi* movements I developed after my own mastectomy, to help post-mastectomy clients regain upper body strength, a sense of symmetry, and to prevent lymphedema.



For those who were interested in spiking high tech prowess in their practice the workshop entitled: "Technology for ABT Practitioners : Practical Tools to Manage your Practice," by AOBTA board member and IT consultant Steve Torino paced folks through high tech solutions for everything from appointment scheduling, online invoicing and mobile payments, to website builder tools and definitions of course specific vocabs (such as Cloud, SaaS; web browsers, desktop and mobile operating systems).

When AOBTA Treasurer Stuart Watts facilitated an interactive discussion during the "Ethics in ABT issues" workshop, the question of client privacy arose in relation to the storage and protection of patient files - and access. Privacy matters were broadened to include the ethical considerations of overhearing a client's spouse discuss issues such as his/her HIV status in a public or ER setting, and a therapist's dilemma. Does one share this info with the client or not? In fact, would it be ethical to withhold such information from a client?



There was some vividly contrasting views when it came time for representatives of member schools and programs from different states to share their experiences and philosophies. Carey Johnson Pelava (Center Point Massage and Shiatsu Therapy School - of Minneapolis MN), spoke about their twin programs of Shiatsu and Massage Therapy and the importance of participation in the broad range of associations and teachers' associations serving the bodywork community in the interests of an integrative medical future. She asked, "Are we being the best stewards for ABT by staying separate?" Shirley Scranta (International School of Shiatsu in Doyleston, Penn.) spoke about longevity, and school founder Saul Goodman's long term international teaching reputation, encouraging a student body from across the New England states and Europe. Not only was their program exempt from licensing in Pennsylvania, but the school seemed to attract "rebels" who were against legislative restrictions. Steve Rogne (Zen Shiatsu Chicago Ill) described growth strategies offering programs enabling students to qualify in both Zen Shiatsu and Massage Therapy, and his extensive outreach work to Massage and Acupuncture communities. Rogne favors an impetus toward independent licensing for ABT via a national exam.



Perhaps one of the most reflective workshops came from Barbra Esher - former AOBTA President and Director of Education, in her "Core of an Enlightened Practice: Cultivating Empathy and Presence," where she guided participants through the art of being able to differentiate between empathetic and non-empathetic responses to a client's pain. Barbra covered the floor with a mosaic of key words such as *Creativity, Sustenance, Ease, Presence, Protection, Meaning, Diversity*, and encouraged participants to select the words that resonated with them personally.

### Conclusion

Finally Wayne Mylin, AOBTA President, summarized the event in his thoughtful and reflective way at the Saturday night dinner, as an opportunity to regroup, pause, and plan future directions. He addressed the loss of the NCCAOM ABT Exam and possible avenues for AOBTA® future growth. Captivating just that aim, the board of directors organized a fun task during the membership meeting at the dinner, when members at each table were assigned temporary board positions and asked to provide vision, assessments and goals to grow the organization. The game prompted some creative suggestions and resolutions currently posted on the AOBTA® website.

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