



GENERAL ACUPUNCTURE

Peer Points: Thinking Outside the Box

STORIES OF PRACTICE SUCCESS

Brenda Duran

Growing up, Claire Alice McManus M. Ac., Lic. Ac. had established a strong bond with animals from horses to dogs. Before becoming a full-time acupuncturist, McManus didn't realize one day her two strongest passions would collide. During acupuncture school, she interned at a mixed animal/human practice and found her niche.

She has maintained her private practice since 2001 and has found tremendous amount of success in treating animals as well as humans. Some of the animals she has on her list include dogs, penguins and [endangered sea turtles](#) as well as race horses. Her area of specialty has received attention from not only local veterinarians in her hometown of Massachusetts but also across the country.

In treating both animals and humans, McManus said she has been able to see firsthand the numerous benefits of acupuncture unfold before her eyes repeatedly.

McManus chatted with *Acupuncture Today* about the small steps she took out of acupuncture school to ensure her big future.

AT: Tell us about going from an acupuncture graduate of NESAs to being a successful business owner. What are some of the important steps you took?

CM: I hit the pavement; I walked everywhere with my dog and always had cards with me. I opened up shop in the neighborhood where I lived, which I think was very important. I contacted some seasoned acupuncturists and told them I was available for home visits, taking on their overflow and getting my feet wet that way. I returned every phone call within hours and thanked every referral personally.

AT: How did you get into treating animals? How has this contributed to your overall success as practitioner?

I had a background in organic livestock farming and was comfortable with animals from the start. I apprenticed with a local canine acupuncturist and took several courses after [NESA](#) in treating animals. Now, my reputation for working with veterinarians at The New England Aquarium and Zoo New England has bolstered my credibility with small animal vets looking for a place to refer.



Photo By Steve Heaslip Cape Cod Times

AT: When it came time to market yourself as an animal and human acupuncturist, how did you go about doing this?

I always had cards with me at the dog park. I handled dogs with tuina in mind and mentioned to owners what I did. I gave talks on canine acupressure at local pet shops and dog training centers. I used my dog trainer and local pet shop to build a referral base, and contacted the K9 trainers for Boston Police. If they didn't need an acupuncturist they usually knew someone who did. Treating animals is a unique thing; I started getting press by calling local papers myself and getting neighborhood coverage, the coverage continued beyond local media outlets to national and international ones. Last month a story about me went as far as the *Himalayan Times*, it was quite exciting.

AT: As an acupuncturist, what is the latest trend in your practice that you think is affecting the way acupuncturists do business these days?

Boston is a very educated town. My human patient base consists of professors, Western medical professionals, high-tech people and they want to understand the research that's out there. I stay on top of current acupuncture research topics (a [Society for Acupuncture Research](#) membership is great for this!) and make sure I am conversant.

AT: You are frequently called upon to talk about treating animals with acupuncture. What are people most curious about and how do you teach them?

Many of my canine patients are service dogs, and owners are very concerned about aging, digestive and mobility issues. I teach a lot of hands on palpation, point location and at-home massage techniques, particularly how to locate and hand treat the back shu points. The most common question I get is "How do you get the dog to stay still?" In truth, put in *Yintang* and most dogs just fall asleep for ten minutes!

AT: How are animals changing the way acupuncture is viewed by patients?

I have worked on several NIH studies as an acupuncturist with various controlled amounts of interaction with patients and I understand the discussion and research on placebo effect. There is no doubt that coming into a tranquil office space with a kind practitioner is helpful for everyone on some level. But when a dog limps in then walks out it's clear that there is a physiologic change as a result of acupuncture. It's quite gratifying for all. I think patients are impressed when they see acupuncture works on a dog or even a sea turtle!

AT: In your practice, what are the most common health issues you are seeing these days - for both animals and humans?

In animals, I feel most successful at treating musculo-skeletal, neurological and digestive issues and I limit most animal treatments to that spectrum. My human issues are a much wider scope, and include anxiety, depression, fertility, digestive issues and chemotherapy support.

AT: What are some of the Traditional Chinese Medicine principles you personally follow to achieve success?

As a farmer, concepts of yin/yang initially attracted me to this medicine. For example, when we garden, we understand and expect that a perennial plant will hibernate in the winter and will emerge in the spring. As a culture we are less confident and forgiving about these needs to regenerate within ourselves, our families and even our businesses. There is no doubt that as practitioners we're going to have weeks where the phone is ringing off the hook and weeks where

it seems like every one reschedules or cancels. When things get quiet I roll with it, rest up and have the confidence of a gardener that it will all be back!

AT: As an acupuncture business owner what are some mistakes you made early on?

I didn't define my schedule, I saw people at 7 am and 7 pm and all day in between and squeezed in anyone who called. I felt burned out in 5 years. Twelve years out I am much more satisfied. I set limits, I shut off my phone on the weekends and I also get regular treatment myself!

AT: What do you think is the most important business lesson most acupuncturists need to learn to succeed in today's world?

Believe it or not, it's probably the same stuff we learned in kindergarten. Say Please & Thank You. Be patient and be prompt. Breathe before you pick up the phone. Start every phone intake with "How can I help you?" It is amazing how courtesy, attention and a little time breaks the ice for someone in pain or confused about a new treatment. Take time with that first phone call; it's the moment they decide whether to walk in your door or not. The most common complaint about health care we hear from our patients is their doctor never listened to them or never called them back! A practitioner who pays polite attention stands out.

AT: Since you graduated from NESAs, what has been the greatest business lesson you have learned?

I've never purchased an ad or offered a promotional discount, and my full practice is entirely word of mouth. As important as great websites, Facebook, Twitter and emails may be, nothing beats an old fashioned card in the mail. In the past decade I have literally sent out thousands of hand written cards to patients after surgery, births, deaths, losses, referrals, every New Years... Writing a card is a moment for you to be grateful for the honor of treating a patient and to show him or her you truly care; and, it is not forgotten.

AT: What tips would you give seasoned acupuncturists still trying to find their niche?

Treat what you really care about and love to learn about. Refer the rest out! We all come out of school generalists and then migrate in certain directions. If you're not sure where you're migrating, talk to other acupuncturists, get together with old classmates, and think about what it is that makes you most satisfied every day. Stay current on research and be confident and excited about what you do; it's contagious.

Would you like to share your story of success? Email bduran@mpamedia.com and you could appear in one of our future issues!

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