



YOUR PRACTICE / BUSINESS

Peer Points: Spreading The Word

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Pedram Shojai describes his venture into Traditional Chinese Medicine as a journey led by various "mystical experiences." Shojai decided to change the course of his career when he looked deeper into the basics of TCM. Since receiving his Master's in Oriental Medicine from Emperor's College and OMD from PanAmerican University, Shojai has highlighted the benefits of TCM around the world through talks, seminars, workshops and recently even two documentaries.

For the past 20 years, he has also studied kung fu, *tai chi*, *qi gong*, yoga, meditation and medicine diligently. His passion is spreading the word about health through writing books and teaching. In his latest documentary, *Vitality*, Shojai explores issues within our current health care system and challenges us to wake up to our personal stake in health. He features interviews with renowned experts in the fields of health, wellness, spirituality and yoga, to explore the relationship between health and consciousness.

Using the advantages of the digital world to advance TCM, Shojai has also been able to build a brand. Here he shares why he believes acupuncturists can take their passion for TCM a lot farther than they think.

AT: Tell us about going from studying biology at UCLA to going into Eastern medicine. What motivated you to change course?



PS: I was interning at the Pain Medicine Center and was really excited to help people as a doctor. After a few short months, I was very disenchanted with the system and the poor results I was seeing. I was studying *tai chi* on campus at the time and had a visceral experience of *qi*. It was undeniable and so when I met acupuncturists through my kung fu studies, I was open to it and agreed to observe one day with an OMD. What I saw that day I couldn't explain at the time, but I could not deny the fact I experienced it. I was hooked and had to know.

AT: How did you get into creating your own website Well.org? How has this contributed to your overall success as a health practitioner?

PS: Well.org is a hub for my movies, radio shows, web shows, blogs, articles and general interests. It has done tremendously well for me as it has elevated my personal brand and people seek me out from all over the world. My goal was to step up and play a bigger game instead of trying to fit into the broken system of established healthcare. I created my own world and have a much nicer sandbox to play in. I'm now friends with the biggest name doctors in the world and we all speak as colleagues and friends. My advice to acupuncturists- up your game and know your value in this world. Don't get reduced to a provider in a failing model- be a doctor in a thriving new model that revolves around wellness and prevention. We hold the keys to that.

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

PS: Insurance. It sucks and keeps getting worse. Learn how to create a cash practice and give your patients super bills to go after the carriers themselves. After all, they are the customers and we are third party entities that get sidelined all of the time. If you can avoid the system, do so.

AT: When it came time to market yourself, how did you go about doing this?

PS: Relationships and results. Make friends with key influencers in your area (MDs, business owners, teachers...) and be your awesome self. I mean you- not me. We are interesting people and shouldn't be shy about what we know and how we can help. I'm sick of seeing our people be apologetic about the profession or meek in their encounters with the world. Again, we hold the key to the future of medicine and should (humbly) act accordingly. Secondly, be a great doctor. Nothing speaks better than great results. Learn to track them and get testimonials all the time. I don't advertise. People hear about me from someone I've helped and come in asking for an appointment. Not "how much, what insurance do you take, or let me clear this with my cranky old GP" but, "when can you see me?" Why? Because people talk and results are solid gold in a world filled with mediocre improvement with drugs and stale medical waiting rooms.

AT: You produced a documentary about overall health. What are people most curious about and how do you teach them when it comes to their health?

PS: When dealing with my producers at the start of this movie, they wanted to go in the direction of trippy machines that cure AIDS the government or Big Brother doesn't want us to know about. I argued that if I could get my people to simply eat some frickin' vegetables, I could change the health of this country. That's where I took the movie. *Vitality* is about how we live. I broke it into the superstructure of diet, exercise, sleep and mindset to make it palatable and easy to understand. This movie was not created to wow my esteemed colleagues who already know this stuff, but as a patient education tool to share with our patients. I'm already working with the IFM and ACAM to distribute the movie through all of their doctors to patients around the world. The MDs are all over it. The acupuncturists are the choir on this for sure.

AT: How do you get people to see acupuncture as a powerful method of healing?

PS: The results speak for themselves. Just post testimonials of patients you've helped with complex and seemingly incurable conditions and, as they stack up, you start to look like a wizard. That's when I defer and simply state that this is the power of natural and oriental medicine. This becomes an amazing portal to then get them learning *tai chi* or whatever other lifestyle practice you leverage them into in order to maintain and continue to enhance their vitality.

AT: In your practice, what are the most common health issues you are seeing these days?

PS: Big functional medicine problems. I see lot of gluten sensitivities, which overlay into brain fog, leaky gut, headaches and more. I'm the go-to guy for several orthopedists in the region who basically say "send them to Pedram" when they hit a wall with a difficult case. That's what I've built my reputation on. I have to unwind their diets, inflammation and whatever else is off and then they get better (usually). You turn a lot of heads when you suddenly cure a case that 6 to 8 docs have given up on. That's when they take you to lunch and that's when you play it cool and don't ask for referrals but just hang out, be cool and make friends. Desperation smells funny. Be on par with them ... do not cower.

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

PS: Too many to want to remember!

AT: What advice would you give to other acupuncturists?

PS: 1. get help. Don't answer your own phones. Be the doctor and they'll treat you accordingly.

2. Specialize. Don't treat everything (although you don't want to turn down the money) - really get good at one thing and go after that type of case ... get good and hold your own. From there, you can branch out as you get better and better.

3. Collaborate. Trying to be superman can alienate people in your referral network. Leave the DC, nutritionist, ortho, and family doc their place at the table and they'll all play nicely with you. There's a flow to patient referrals and you need to demonstrate that you're a team player and value their contribution or they'll just never send another patient your way superstar.

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

PS: Treat it like a business. Heal and be kind but don't short-change yourself and not charge for services. Barter if they can't afford it but remember there's an energetic exchange and money makes the world go-round, or at least pays the rent and buys needles. With abundance, you can grow and pay for the courses you want to take. With more money, you can advertise and hire other doctors. As a profession, I think we're all a bit stuck on that because we've all seen how distasteful some of the chiro tactics out there have been. Here's the key, you don't have to be slimy to make money. Just be good and make sure you have systems in place to charge and grow.

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

PS: Rest when tired and understand that everything in the universe is in dynamic movement. Position yourself in the flow of abundance and good will and good things come your way effortlessly.

AT: Since you graduated from Emperor's College, what has been the greatest business lesson you have learned?

PS: Never partner with an egomaniac. They suck up all the oxygen in the room and there will always be a bad ending when someone's "other math" drives events and decisions that effect you. Trust me on this one!

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

PS: Maybe your niche is to be the family doctor if you haven't found it already. Learn to triage and refer out, that'll build a bigger network of friends in medicine and keep feeding you more patients in that realm. A lot of us get started and simply take what comes and build the plane as we are flying it. Really ask yourself what it is that fulfills you and what types of patients you really enjoy spending your time with. Just water the plants you want to have in our garden and that's what your life will be filled with.

Do you have a story of success you would like to share? Email Senior Associate Editor Brenda Duran at bduran@mpamedia.com.

