



GENERAL ACUPUNCTURE

Acupuncture Ambassadors: A Chat with Leader Anthony M. Giovanniello, MSAc, LAc

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When you first meet Anthony Giovanniello, you realize he's a humble practitioner, yet is bursting with a type of dedication that you can't help but be overwhelmingly inspired by. Anthony is the founder of Acupuncture Ambassadors, a large-scale humanitarian effort that has been directly bringing Oriental medicine to the global community since 2007. I had the pleasure of interviewing Anthony several years ago when I first learned about his massive goal to spread Asian medicine to under served areas of the world. A lot has happened since we last spoke. Anthony spoke to me to catch us up on how the organization has continued to cultivate its reach.

C.D: Since Acupuncture Ambassadors (AA) began in 2007, the defining goal has been integrating the medicine of acupuncture into global health care. In what ways have you been meeting this goal since then?

AA: Since its inception, Acupuncture Ambassadors (AA) has explored a number of organizational models to reach our goal. As with any organization there is a period of growing pains and we certainly went through that. Our goals have been ever-evolving as we try different ways and learn from our triumphs and our missteps. One of the most inherent challenges we have and continue to face is that we are doing something that's quite a "big idea." We are trying to bring international public awareness, acceptance and ongoing use of a powerful, time tested, effective and economical medicine that if properly integrated into global health would enormously change healthcare and access to it for everyone. AA has felt that one of the best ways to "spread the word" about our medicine that leads towards appropriate integration is to show the world that it can work anywhere and everywhere. In our case, in humanitarian work. No small or simple task. But we are certainly up for the challenge.



Anthony M. Giovanniello

Although there are more than 30 humanitarian acupuncture organizations out in the world, the idea of using the medicine of acupuncture and East Asian medicine in the realm of humanitarian work is a fairly new and in some cases an unknown idea. In the past few years Acupuncture Ambassadors has executed missions in a number of international locations. We feel those missions were successful for that moment in time when we were "on the ground." With each mission we bring more awareness of acupuncture especially in places where it is generally unknown. We also make it a point to seek out new connections with doctors, hospitals and medical universities in those places. But sustainability of the work is always the bigger issue. There are a number of fantastic organizations like Acupuncture Relief Project in Nepal, Barefoot Acupuncturists and Moringa Project in India, just to name a few, that are really making sustainability happen in their own way by focusing on and creating permanent clinics. But I can say from my own experience that these kind of efforts takes real commitment, much patience and sacrifice as well as substantial ongoing financing to keep them strong and ongoing. AA is working to promote and support the efforts of all Humanitarian Acupuncture groups and help find ways for all these projects to become sustainable.

CD: Acupuncture Ambassadors strives to create educational opportunities to advance the professional study of Asian medicine around the world. Are there any current projects focusing on this?

AA: Another aspect of our work is to create opportunities for training in our medicine. I have met so many people who could find their life calling in the study and practice of acupuncture and East Asian medicine, but their opportunities for this training are rare. We feel that to truly have integration of our medicine into global healthcare we need to have many more qualified practitioners from all parts of the world. There are some great organizations providing multi-level training programs, but for the most part the opportunities for training are few and the need great. One of the ongoing projects Acupuncture Ambassadors is to facilitate partnerships with existing

traditional Asian medicine colleges and universities internationally and initiate the creation of satellite "sister schools" of these educational institutions in countries where access to training is either limited or non-existent. These satellite schools would create a whole new wave of practitioners who can serve people in their own country. They can also offer opportunities for other international students attend classes and get their "feet wet" working in the school's clinic in a foreign country as well as expert teachers from all over the world to help train these new practitioners. This kind of project can serve all involved.

Acupuncture Ambassadors is collaborating with a group of "like minded" traditional medicine practitioners in Europe to develop a proposal for a feasibility study of all multilevel, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in the fields of: Therapies of East Asian Medicine (TEAM) Herbal Medicines & Acupuncture, Ayurvedic medicine, Unani medicine, Chiropractic, Osteopathy, Homeopathy, Meditation and a generalized overview of other self care methods. So far there has not been a full accounting of all the organizations (practitioner membership organizations, primary health care units, patient bodies and academic institutes) out there in the world. Once there is an understanding of who these organizations are and what activities they engage in, there will be an opportunity for the establishment of a global, cross sectional network of traditional, indigenous, complementary and alternative medicines and self-care methods. These medicines largely exist outside the conventional, Western medical infrastructure and are currently not understood by WHO or Member States. In the long-term, this network would exist to be utilized in numerous ways; firstly, the sourcing and centralization of existing data and research to answer questions of efficacy, safety and value. This would facilitate the key objectives of the 2nd WHO TRM Global Strategy due next year. This would lead to the alignment of research protocols and classifications for universal coverage. The network would further facilitate the WHO role in providing Member States with up-to-date statistics on the prevalence and nature of these types of medical modalities and their relative value or threat to domestic healthcare. This is an opportunity for Member States to have many more medical options for creating and sustaining health and wellbeing for their people. Upon completion this proposal will be presented to the WHO and Member States. Although still in the development stage we wish to find all who would be interested in participating and promoting this project internationally. Also if there are individuals who have connections in the health administrations of member states we are looking for their support of this project even at this early stage.

CD: Your response to Acupuncture Ambassadors has been overwhelmingly supportive and inspirational. What does this mean for the Chinese medical professional community at-large?

AA: We take the "Ambassadors" part of our name seriously. There are many individuals, companies and organizations out there promoting and marketing the use of our medicine and in the last 15 years so many more people know what acupuncture is. In this sense we all are Ambassadors in our own way. But I do feel that so much of the energy and efforts of promotion is focused mostly all on the business of the medicine. Yes we certainly need to have viable and verified research studies, continuing education, insurance parity, marketing, products and tools and employment opportunities etc. We all need to make a living without out a doubt but there is a whole world out there that doesn't care about any of those things. They desperately need us and our medicine to be able to live healthy and fulfilled lives. This I truly believe. As an organization that is dedicated to mainstreaming the medicine, we feel that "Ambassadorship" must take a more extensive role in the world of healthcare. As most of us who have done some community relief or humanitarian work knows, every country on the planet needs to have multitudes of trained practitioners, teachers, clinics, integrated hospitals and preventative wellness programs. There should be representatives of our medicine working and promoting its use at all levels of health administration in governments and communities throughout the world.

The efforts of Acupuncture Ambassadors benefit all professionals working in this field by helping to raise the status of the medicine to a place that it truly deserves. This medicine has been around a very long time. In the end the reality is that the more people who know and understand what this medicine is, how it works and its effectiveness, the more they will choose it as their go-to healthcare choice.

CD: How are you encouraging professionals to get involved on the "home front" here in the states? Are there opportunities for involvement if professionals aren't able to travel?

AA: We are very active in social media with AA groups on Facebook and LinkedIn where we continue to gather new group members every week. I am always excited when practitioners find out what is going on there in the world in the name of their medicine.

If someone wants to contribute on the "home front" there are many ways to help move the Humanitarian Acupuncture movement forward. And it is a movement! There are numerous organizations like the ones I mentioned previously that could use volunteers at home. Of course fundraising is a top priority. Study the organizations and adopt one. Make it your own. Run a community acupuncture day with the proceeds going to your organization of choice. If you are a student, start a Humanitarian Acupuncture discussion group at school or even speak to your administration about an accredited class in International Public Health. Encourage your school's administrators and alumni to spread the word about this movement even among their patients. Our Facebook and LinkedIn group pages are always updated with the activities, trainings and mission plans of many of the organizations. We also have an extensive list of Humanitarian Acupuncture organizations on the Acupuncture Ambassadors website under Global Humanitarian Activities / organizations.

In terms of AA we wish to start chapters of Acupuncture Ambassadors wherever there are people who see the importance of this work and wish to engage at any level. We have colleagues working on that in Japan and Spain but I encourage students, teachers and practitioners in the U.S. to contact me if they would like to start a chapter in their community.

I feel very strongly that there are some amazing "big ideas" in our medicine out there that are not getting enough attention and support in our international community and here at home. Moxafrica is a charitable organization set up to investigate the use of moxibustion therapy for the treatment of tuberculosis and drug resistant TB, particularly in resource-poor environments. They are conducting clinical trials in Uganda and initial results are quite promising. This kind of work is a game changer in international public health. Think about it, using a low cost, effective component of our medicine to treat TB in the millions of people who are infected. Game Changer!



Woman being treated in Nepal during an Acupuncture Ambassador mission

Then there is the Pan African Acupuncture Project (PAAP). PAAP trains local healthcare workers to use simple and effective acupuncture techniques that enable them to treat the symptoms associated with HIV/AIDS, malaria, TB and other debilitating conditions. This is an amazing organization that really needs to be supported by all of us.

It has been a little over a year since The Global Clinic organization lost their founder Anne Keiko Golombos. In remembrance of her life, vision and work, The Global Clinic has taken tremendous strides. Their work in Quiche, Guatemala has been amazing. The Global Clinic is well worth adopting.

And then there are local relief organizations like CRREW (Community Relief and Rebuilding through Education and Wellness) CRREW has remained active serving the NYC area, other areas impacted by 9/11 and people impacted by hurricanes in Louisiana. CRREW has worked with many groups including the Red Cross, NOVA, Safe Horizon, Mt Sinai WTC Program, St Vincent's Hospital and scores of community based groups. CRREW is still reaching out to people and communities impacted by Hurricane Sandy.

Global Alternative Healthcare Project (GAHP) is another organization that works places like Bali and Nepal but also has a strong presence on Native American Reservations. GAHP exists to serve communities in need through the delivery of free, high quality healthcare: to empower communities with tools for sustainable health; and to provide the opportunity for meaningful human exchange through caring for one another.

CD: Last time we spoke you were getting ready to launch a documentary style television series, Point To Point: On The Road with Modern Barefoot Doctors. We discussed that unlike other reality based TV series, you truly believe this will make an impact on modern mainstream, allowing people to see the medicine work in real-life situations. What's new with this project and how has it evolved?

AA: As you may know I had been in television production for years before my acupuncture career. Being intimately involved in the industry I always knew that producing a series is not an easy proposition. Point to Point is different than most other "reality" based series as it showcases the work of Humanitarian Acupuncture organizations around the world. It has all the right elements: travel, adventure, compassion and an intimate look at the lives of real people and how they are changed by access to the medicine. We also have a fantastic host for the series in Acupuncturist /Herbalist Gillian Marsollier of Canada. We have strong interest in the series from a number of TV distribution outlets and we are weighing our options. We will still produce the series as the concept is too good not to happen.

As I had previously mentioned, fundraising for humanitarian work is challenging and Acupuncture Ambassadors is no exception. We were thinking of some "out of the box" ways to become financially sustainable. As our development of "Point to Point" progressed over the last 2 years, we realized that there was so much more opportunity for creating media to promote Acupuncture and all of its branches to the masses that had been unexplored. It was then that AA formed a partnership with a group of veteran producers of media, music and television. The new venture, In Balance Media, LLC (IBM), was created in part as a for-profit entity to financially support the non-profit work of Acupuncture Ambassadors.

We have quite an agenda in terms of ongoing and future projects. At present we have launched a YouTube Channel called "The Balance Channel." The Balance Channel programming is based on the 8 Branches of Asian Medicine: Acupuncture, Meditation, Nutrition, Herbology, Exercise, Massage, Feng Shui and Chinese Astrology. Our team of experts present videos that discuss the

basic ideas of each branch in a simple and concise way. These videos are a great way for the general public to understand how powerful the medicine is and how they can integrate it into their daily lives. It's a great resource for practitioners to send their patients for additional information on the medicine. We are very excited about a new series we are launching in early 2014. It is "20 of the Most Asked Questions About Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine" video series hosted by Gillian Marsollier.

And in the spirit of Acupuncture Ambassadors, The Balance Channel features videos from Humanitarian Acupuncture organizations worldwide.

In Balance Media is developing "The Balance Talks," a forum similar to "Ted Talks." These forums, recorded live in a public venue, will be on ideas and concepts of Asian medicine for the education of the public. The talks will be given by members of the In Balance Media Speakers Bureau. The talks will then be accessed on "The Balance Channel."

CD: What have you unexpectedly learned in terms of sustainable practices overseas that we can take a cue from here in the states?

AA: I think that what I have come to understand is that with healthcare strategies overseas everything is local. Most people in developing countries don't have real and direct access to or support of government institutions. The projects that AA have partnered with were started by individuals who are concerned about the welfare of their neighbors. Everything is grassroots. These projects always take so much more time to establish but when there are dedicated people who are passionate about a cause things can happen and can continue ongoing. Sustainability comes from not waiting for someone else to do it.

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