



EDUCATION & SEMINARS

## Five-Element Reaches Out to Serve the Community

In 2006, a student at the Institute of Taoist Education and Acupuncture (ITEA) approached the administration about an idea for his senior project. Having family members and people in his community who had served in the armed forces, he felt a compelling need to offer help with acupuncture. He was aware that many veterans were financially challenged and would find the cost of treatment prohibitive. His project was to set up an on-site clinic at ITEA to offer free acupuncture to veterans once a week. To get this off the ground and to raise funds, he began to market his idea to the local community in Louisville, Colo., as well as in his home town of Seattle. By contacting acupuncture supplies companies, he was able to obtain donations of needles and other items.

Soon the ITEA Veterans Clinic was up and running and has been operating for the past nine years. Having graduated from ITEA some years ago, he recently said that he was "truly touched to know that veterans and their families are still benefiting from it and that ITEA students are getting to see the impact that they are having on this segment of society first hand. And I am honored to know that I played a role in that."



The free clinic is open every Wednesday evening to veterans, both new and existing clients. The cost of the clinic is now subsidized by ITEA, and students volunteer to work in the clinic under the direct supervision of a clinical supervisor.

As a part of the college's practice management course, students hold various manager roles, one of which is the manager of the veterans' clinic. These student veterans' clinic managers hold their position for six months and spend time each month networking and contacting other local veterans' groups to let them know about ITEA's program. This process has taught the students many valuable lessons about how to network. Although they found there were many times when they met a dead end, this became an important lesson in not giving up, as there were equally times of great response and enthusiasm.



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ITEA was fortunate to have a student who was a veteran and who gave the original program manager a list of contacts nationally, and suggested reaching out to local veterans' groups. Since that time, students have stayed in contact with a few veterans' support groups in the local area. Existing clients have also helped with networking and students also received some great advice and help from Acupuncturists Without Borders (AWB). By far, the biggest success in reaching veterans has come from word of mouth over the years. In January, the clinic was approached by a local newspaper that sent reporters to observe the clinic and interview clients, student interns, and supervisors. This resulted in a one-page article which attracted more clients.

On average, three veterans are treated each week although this number can vary. In 2014-2015, 32 veterans also became patients at the regular student clinic. Wendy Dutton, the current student veteran's clinic manager, said that "Whether there's a softness in their energy or relaxation in their posture, a noticeable shift occurs within all who come for treatment, and they tell me that it's even more noticeable to them."

Treatment in this community clinic is based on the NADA protocol and significant positive changes have been observed and reported by many clients. One client, who was recovering from PTSD, said, "The first time I went to the clinic, I was having a slight headache. As soon as I received treatment, I could feel my headache start to fade away. I had better sleep overall the following week." The wife of another veteran, whose daughter was also treated, indicated that, "The clinic for veterans is such a wonderful thing! Those treatments did so much for us all as a family as my husband had relief from his distressing symptoms." Another client who then transferred to the regular student clinic said, "Before I came in, I was having a lot of problems and now I'm problem free. I also felt old, and now I feel young." Many report changes in their emotional state, or sleep.

According to deputy clinic director, James Damman, MAc, LAc, Dipl.Ac. (NCCAOM), some with more complex histories had symptoms that did not respond to other modes of treatment.

Veterans who needed additional help were also informed about ITEA's regular student clinic where there is time to go into much more detail about their individual circumstances and health concerns in a private, safe environment. In the regular clinic, veterans receive Classical Five-Element treatments that form the core of ITEA's instructional approach. As the college also greatly subsidizes the cost of treatment for veterans in its regular student clinic, many veteran's clinic clients have transferred over to the regular student clinic. Recently, ITEA showed its students the movie *Escape Fire*, which is a very educational look at the current health system in the U.S. and how acupuncture can help veterans. ITEA is very proud of its veterans program and how much students have been able to learn first-hand about marketing, dealing with rejection, and communicating with people about the work they do.

### Homeless Shelter

The other project in which ITEA clinical year students have been involved is working at the local homeless shelter in Boulder. Once again, it was another student who initiated this community outreach as part of his senior project. The student, who was assisted by ITEA's Clinic Director, met with the team of counselors at the shelter to explore treatment options and to ensure compliance with OSHA and other requirements. A pilot program was started in 2012 for an 8-week period, whereby students and a supervisor visited the shelter in the evenings once a week to work with the shelters' transition program, a cutting edge initiative that assists qualifying homeless persons in retaining a job, saving money, and finding stable housing.

Student interns provided free acupuncture to many of the homeless people at the shelter. The students treated between 8 to 11 people each week and the shelter staff said it was the most well attended program of all the different services they offer. The staff also reported that they loved it when the ITEA clinicians came, as there was a sense of quiet and peacefulness that pervaded the shelter on those days - something that was not usual.

ITEA gathered feedback from the clients who received acupuncture treatments at the shelter. Based on 60 returned evaluations on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not effective and 5 being the most effective, 18% gave the treatments a rating of 5, 38% gave a rating of 4, 38% gave a rating of 3, and only 6% gave the treatments a rating of 2 or below for effectiveness.

The student manager for this project said, "There were some unique situations that presented to us as we treated people who were HIV positive, or who were suffering from significant emotional or mental pain. We also had some great direct experiences. One patient who had severe nerve pain in his arm, felt it released immediately."

ITEA hopes to continue this program if the college can obtain additional sustaining funding, something that is being investigated at this time.

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