

# Public Speaking for Success

## HOW TO GET NEW PATIENTS

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I often make the joke that I have chosen to incorporate two of people's largest phobias into my life — needles and public speaking. While acupuncturists are obviously not afraid of needles, I have found that many of my colleagues out there are afraid of public speaking. Although it may seem intimidating to stand in front of a group of people and discuss TCM, I have found that in reality, it is one of the easiest and most cost-effective ways to get new patients through your door. I have done a wide variety of speaking engagements within my community, discovering a number of techniques and strategies to help achieve success in public speaking.

Choosing to do speaking engagements, and especially focusing on speaking engagements local to the area in which you live, offers a number of benefits to both your community and to your private practice. By inviting your community members to learn about TCM, you raise awareness of the professional as a whole. Most people are curious to learn about acupuncture, and who better to teach them about the subject than an acupuncturist?

By controlling the narrative around TCM and acupuncture, you can quickly dispel myths surrounding our medicine and give patients the most coherent idea of what it is that we do. Speaking engagements are also of great benefit to your personal practice since every audience member is a potential patient. By assuming this attitude towards the audience, you're not selling these people anything they don't need either. The population drawn to attending these talks is generally there because they want to know if acupuncture can help them or a family member, you just have to let them know that it can.

### Practice Makes Perfect

The first hurdle to overcome at the start of your public speaking journey is in becoming a confident and competent speaker. While there are certainly classes and organizations dedicated to help people become good public speakers, there is a great deal that you can do on your own to help develop your abilities.

Just like with any other skill, consistent practice is ultimately the key to success. If the thought of standing in front of an audience makes your blood run cold, practice without the audience first. Give the speech in front of the mirror. Make your pets listen to it! Ask a loved one to be your first real audience. I think recording yourself and watching your talk is also tremendously valuable. I've picked up on a number of unconscious habits that I wanted to remove from my public speaking persona. As an example, I tend to use my hands to talk frequently, and I also have a habit of speaking quickly. Seeing how clearly those things could easily distract an audience from the content of my talk was a perfect impetus to try and break those habits.

### Speaking in the Community

Once you've gotten more comfortable with the idea of getting in front of an audience, your next task is to find that audience. There are a wide variety of places that could be interested in having

you come speak to them. Personally, I've given talks at Rotary club meetings, public libraries, a high school, business associations, and a natural food market, among others. Organizations that meet monthly (like service organizations and networking groups) are always on the lookout for public speakers.

These organizations also do you the favor of giving you an automatic audience — no recruiting or marketing is required by you to get people in the room. Community centers, libraries, and meet-up groups are another source that often look to sponsor programming. These types of facilities will share the burden of promoting your talk with you. I've had talks at a library promoted by the library itself on Facebook, in the newspaper, and through handouts at the check-out counter.

This all required zero effort on my part. I do, however, encourage you to assist your sponsoring organization in attracting people to the lecture. I recommend you make good use of what inexpensive resources you have at your fingertips; using social media, contacting local publications, and making flyers available in your office are all relatively painless efforts on your part to drum up interest in your talk.

Especially if you are just beginning to explore public speaking, I think the most important thing you can do is never turn down a possible engagement. Until you are a well-recognized leader or expert on your topic of choice, it's likely that you not going to get paid for speaking engagements. Do them anyway. You'll spend little besides your own time on preparing these talks, and the payoff in terms of potential patient volume is well worth the donation of that time.

You may get some audiences that seem too small to bother with, but every talk you do might reach someone or lead to another engagement down the line. The worst-case scenario with a small audience is that you just got another opportunity to practice public speaking in a relatively low-stress environment. In the end, seizing every opportunity will only make you a more polished and poised speaker.

### Choosing the Subject Matter

Once you've secured an audience, it becomes time to decide what you would like to speak about. The great thing about giving lectures on TCM is that generally your audience knows very little about it. You don't have to write anything particularly deep or groundbreaking in order to get their attention. All you need to do is make our medicine accessible to the attendees.

If you're stuck for topics, ask your social circle or your patients what they would like to know about TCM or acupuncture. Chances are these suggestions are also ones the general public would be interested in learning about. Keep the scope and breadth of your topic manageable — you want the talk to be easy enough to understand that the audience could give a summary of it afterwards.

I've also found that structuring your talk around a common chief complaint in your practice (i.e. back pain, stress, seasonal allergies, etc.) is helpful because it will focus your talk and draw in people who suffer from that health concern. Keep the talk away from theoretical constructs or professional jargon, and make sure the language you use is clear enough for your audience to easily comprehend.

### Structuring Your Talk

Carefully structuring a talk will also help you maintain audience interest and engagement. To give an idea of a lecture format that I have found to be the most successful, I'm going to walk through the structure of a talk that I have given several times on TCM for stress relief.

As a general rule, I try to keep speaking engagements under forty-five minutes to an hour, and as you'll see, I try to break up the lecture material with a number of interactive methods to hold the audience's attendance. I also try to have some visual aids with me for every lecture, such as a PowerPoint presentation or a small model of a man with the acupuncture points illustrated on him. However, it is enough to give the audience a visual point of interest while I'm speaking.

During the talk, I first introduce myself, explain my training, and then discuss the basic generalities of what TCM is. This includes an overview on how Chinese medicine works, what conditions it can treat, and what a typical treatment might look like. This makes up about half of the talk, and at the end of this section, I always take a brief pause for questions. This allows people to address any confusion they might have about TCM and acupuncture, it also helps them avoid having to remember their question until the end of the talk.

### Utilize Visual Aids

After this question and answer period wraps up, I then pass out a handout that patients can refer to in the second half of the lecture. I deliberately don't pass out the handout ahead of time because I want the audience to stay focused on the topic at hand. It's very easy for people (myself included) to look at the handout in front of them versus paying attention to the words of the speaker.

In the second half of the lecture, I'll go over the specific information relating to the topic I've chosen to focus on. In the stress talk, this involves discussing biomedical information related to stress and health as well as the TCM conceptualization of stress. I then go over a number of lifestyle recommendations for stress (mindfulness, meditation, and daily habits).

I then end by going over a few acupressure points that patients can use at home to treat stress. I'll demonstrate locating these points, and often audience members will follow right along with me to locate the points on themselves. The talk then wraps up with another question and answer period.

### The Audience Take-Away

The handout contains all of the recommendations I've made for lifestyle changes as well as pictures and instructions for the acupressure points. The attendees get to keep a copy of this (which also handily contains all my office information in case they want to schedule an appointment). These handouts prove extremely popular — I recently had someone track me down and email me for a copy of one she received over a year ago at a talk and had since misplaced.

By structuring your talk to include both didactic lecture and hands-on practice, as well as breaking for multiple question and answer periods, you will keep the audience engaged and interested. Keeping the talk dynamic and inviting audience participation results in drastically higher satisfaction rates among the attendees. Additionally, having something for the patients to take home is a great way to both help them feel like they really got something concrete out of the lecture as well to make sure that each and every audience member has a way to contact your office.

It should go without saying that you should also bring every piece of marketing material you have with you for patients to take. Business cards, post cards, and handouts are all relatively inexpensive things to have at your disposal for audience members to take home with them. In overcoming any hesitations or fears you might have about public speaking, you can only benefit your practice. Becoming a confident and capable public speaker will not only bring more patients to your door, but it also benefits every single acupuncturist out there to by increasing awareness of our incredible canon of medicine.

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