



THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

The COVID-19 Practice Strategy That's Here to Stay

5 REASONS TO BUILD CURBSIDE ACUPUNCTURE INTO YOUR BUSINESS PLAN LONG TERM.

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Editor's Note: Dr. Ford received tremendous response from her digital-exclusive article ([May issue](#)) on how she is providing curbside acupuncture during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on that response, this article explains why curbside acupuncture is a successful business model to add to your practice even as social-distancing restrictions relax.

Curbside acupuncture started as a simple idea that almost didn't come to fruition as I contemplated the risks and benefits of offering it to my community during a pandemic. I assume that like most acupuncturists, I see many patients for mental health conditions including bipolar disorders, anxiety, depression and PTSD. I knew after receiving the stay-at-home order from our governor that this was going to be a challenging time for many, and that I needed to find a way to offer continued care for those patients.

In early April, I made the final decision to put the curbside acupuncture concept into motion. Initially, I thought of it as a short-term solution to the COVID pandemic; however, I quickly realized there is a much greater need for these treatments, and that there are additional business benefits in offering curbside acupuncture long term.



Additionally, I discovered that because curbside acupuncture is unique, affordable and approachable, it attracts a much broader audience than any other community event I've been part of. To date, I've treated almost 200 patients with curbside acupuncture. Here are five reasons why you should implement it as part of your practice, too - now and long term.

1. Your Community Needs You

Your patients need you right now. Some simply cannot wait weeks or months on end to receive treatment. Providing curbside treatment could make all the difference in how your patients cope with their individual situations during the pandemic.

I've had many patients break into tears thanking me for being there for them during a time of need, when it feels as if they've been deserted by others. Let us not forget that we are health care providers; we are trained medical professionals and we have the tools to provide relief during challenging times.

2. It's the Perfect Opportunity to Educate

Many of the patients I treat curbside have not previously experienced acupuncture. What an amazing opportunity to inform them of the power of acupuncture and give them their first experience with Chinese medicine!

I can't stress enough how important community education is for your business and our profession. How many times have you been asked this: "Does acupuncture work for ___?" (*fill in the blank*). We still have a long way to go when it comes to helping folks understand what we do.

3. It Increases your New-Patient Count

I participate in many community events for the purpose of connecting with my community and

meeting "potential patients." Curbside acupuncture has brought more new business than any other event, not to mention it's a considerably less expensive approach.

As I mentioned above, I see countless patients who are brand new to acupuncture, and many of these patients enjoy their experience so much that they book in-clinic appointments with me. This fact alone is enough for me to continue offering curbside acupuncture long term ... which leads me to the next reason why you should, too.

4. It Increases Your Revenue

I offer curbside acupuncture for "free"; however, I do accept donations. The most common misconception among acupuncturists is that by offering treatments for "free," I'm not making any money. The truth is I'm making a significant return on curbside acupuncture. The donations I received when my business was closed paid my rent and kept my business afloat.

Since re-opening, my income has considerably increased due to the number of new patients I'm taking in the clinic. While it is true that some patients don't donate for their treatment, most patients pay considerably more than what I might charge.

Note: I do want to mention that while asking for donations is perhaps appropriate at this time, there will come a time when it will become more appropriate to charge.

5. It's Great for SEO

An unexpected benefit of offering curbside acupuncture is the exposure my business has received. Because it's a unique offering, people are talking about it, posting photos and creating stories on their social media pages, and encouraging their friends and families to experience it.

My search-engine optimization (SEO) has drastically improved due to the local attention my business has received, including the social media engagement and increase in website visits. Better SEO means more phone calls and more new patients.

Steps to Get Started

I urge you to give curbside acupuncture a shot; your community will thank you and your practice (and income) will grow. It is quite easy to set up and there are countless ways to do it. Here are the basic steps you need to take to get started:

Pick a location. You need to find a parking lot where you can treat patients safely in their cars. If your clinic has a parking lot, use it; just be sure to get permission from your landlord ahead of time. If your clinic does not have a parking lot, you've got to get creative. Contact a church or business that has an underutilized parking lot and ask permission to offer it there.

Decide on whether you are going to charge a fee or offer it for "free." Think about how you will collect payment; do you have a credit-card swiper or will you only accept cash?

Gather necessary items:

- Table to put your items on
- Clipboards
- Patient paperwork (intake form, informed consent, privacy practices)
- Pens (ideally with your clinic logo on them)
- Tea station if you choose to offer hot tea (kettle, disposable cups)
- Professional canopy (not a necessity, but very useful)

- Signage (something to catch the eyes of passersby)
- Needles and/or ear seeds, sharps container, cotton balls, hand sanitizer, trash can
- Acupuncture cart or apron to hold your needles and other items during treatments

Pick a start date. Decide on when you will start offering this service and what your operating hours will be.

Tell your current patients. I suggest offering it strictly to your current patients on the first day since you're already comfortable with them and can "get your groove down" before opening it up to the general community.

Advertise. Include information about curbside acupuncture on your website and post it on your social media account(s). Consider paying for a social media promotion to aid in getting the word out initially. Many television and print publications offer a free event mention on their platform. Think outside the box and utilize any local resources you can find.

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