

Forging Unity Amid the Chaos

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"In a storm at sea no one on board can wish the ship to sink, and yet not unfrequently all go down together because too many will direct and no single mind can be allowed to control." — President Abraham Lincoln, 1861 State of the Union Address

Chaos and *unity*: perhaps the two most appropriate words to describe the past several months. With all this chaos around us, there is perhaps no better time for the acupuncture profession to truly unite and put the message of *hope and health* out to the world. Choice is a critical aspect of health care. Patients want alternatives, especially when experiencing chronic health conditions. It's our job to educate them on the value of our medicine, particularly during these uncertain times.

Many Styles, One Umbrella

There are many different styles of acupuncture being practiced in the U.S., yet all fall under the umbrella of *traditional medicine*. What is the unified message acupuncture has to share with the public? As terrible as COVID-19 has been, acupuncture offers a message of hope and health. There are many conditions acupuncture can treat as we emerge from the worst (hopefully) of the pandemic. Stress, fatigue, anxiety, insomnia, fear, and pain (both acute and chronic) come to mind.

Why Every Acupuncturist Should Be Doing Reports of Findings

A strong aspect of acupuncture is being able to create an individualized treatment plan based on the history of the patient, diagnosis of the condition and pattern differentiation. When all of these are put together, it forms a treatment plan customized for each patient.

The next step is to present this to the patient and/or the patient's family to explain what you have found and how you plan to treat it. All of this information needs to be presented to a patient in a separately identifiable session:

- Connect the information gathered from your initial intake: history, exam, etc., to your diagnosis.
- Explain your treatment plan, including an explanation of the equipment you will be using: needles, cups, moxa, etc., and other procedures or modalities.
- Share how many visits you are prescribing to the patient.
- Share how often the patient is expected to come in (frequency) to fulfill their recommended visits.

This entire process is called a report of findings (ROF). Do you, as a licensed acupuncturist, provide a ROF to every new patient? Its value goes far beyond meeting the standard of care for a health care provider.

It is during this specifically designed session that the patient *transfers their trust to you*. When you deliver a report of findings, patients will be more likely to accept and comply with your treatment plan / recommendations.

I also suggest that when you present your report, request the patient bring a member of their family. When the family member hears about your detailed diagnosis and treatment plan, you have already begun to educate another new patient.

We also know satisfied patients don't necessarily refer, so if you're working to build a referral business, you want anyone and everyone talking about you and your ability to provide what patients need most these days: *hope and health*.

A Unified Message

In this time of unity, let's not forget that we need to educate patients about acupuncture, specifically needles. Many prospective patients have concerns about needles; it's our job as a unified profession to let the public know the truth: the needles extremely thin and don't hurt.

We also need to continue to educate the public about conditions acupuncture can treat; and how our education has positioned us to understand, assess and safely manage their health concerns.

If we've learned one thing in 2020, it's that the power of *relationships* is profound. The connections we continue to forge with one another as practitioners, a profession - and as human beings - are the seeds that build trust. And trust is the gateway to the growth and acceptance our medicine deserves.

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