

## Oriental Medicine and Acupuncture: Where Are We Going? How Will We Get There?

Happy Year of the Dragon! The staff of *Acupuncture Today* wants to take this opportunity to wish you, your family and staff the best of the new year. We also want to thank you for your overwhelming response to *Acupuncture Today*. Your calls comments and reactions have been wonderful. We appreciate all of you who have read the publication and reacted to it. As the new millennium begins, it is a time of anticipation and excitement. Acupuncture is experiencing an unparalleled level of acceptance in the U.S. Consumers are trying acupuncture in record numbers. The media is providing coverage, and acupuncture is making news nationwide. No one can foretell the future for Oriental medicine, but there are good indications.

Looking back about 50 years, we can see the beginning of the Baby Boomer generation. If you are a student of history, you can see that anyone associated with babies and baby food experienced great business success in that time. As the Baby Boomers became teenagers, there was a huge growth in the fast food industry. In the 1970s, as the Baby Boomers prepared for college, some 200 new colleges were built in the U.S. The building industry experienced a big jump as the Baby Boomers became ready to buy houses.

As they turned 40, Baby Boomers' interest in health began to explode. They began to exercise by themselves at first. The fitness industry then took off in the mid-1980s, and boomers decided that it was more fun to work out with friends. Gyms and fitness centers sprang up everywhere.

As Baby Boomers are turning 50, they want longevity, wellness, fitness, life in their years, and good looks. What does Oriental medicine offer its patients? Wellness paradigms, health regimens, exercise programs, and the opportunities for longevity, beauty and being drug-free. It sounds like a perfect match.

As the sheer number of Baby Boomers in the U.S. (and the rest of the world) gets older, history shoes that any industry affected or touched by Baby Boomers has been wildly successful. We are seeing this now. Sadly, one thing we are also seeing is the effect drugs and alcohol are beginning to have on society, particularly in children.

*The American Journal of Public Health*, for instance, reported last month that one in four children in the U.S. are in some way affected by alcohol abuse in their family.<sup>1</sup> Drug use has become a problem of epidemic proportions, and experts believe that rampant drug and alcohol abuse could one day destroy our way of life.

Fortunately, our state and national leaders have recognized this problem and are beginning to take steps to correct it. Acupuncture is helping to correct this problem, with an acupuncture/counseling program known as "treatment on demand" spreading across the nation and helping people regain their

health and well-being. Other programs have brought patients pain relief without the use of drugs or surgery. Yet for some reason, these programs remain a secret to the American public.

The days of acupuncture being a well-kept secret are becoming a thing of the past. Now is the time for the acupuncture profession to be heard. We must step up and face the challenge of educating everyone that we meet.

Every card that you mail out, every letter that you write, every call you make, and every fax or e-mail you send should carry a message touting the benefits of acupuncture. Network with others to spread the word about the positive impact acupuncture can have.

Our message should be heard loud and clear. We, the members of the Oriental medicine profession, are here to stay, and we can - and will - be part of the solution.

The future of acupuncture and Oriental medicine looks promising. The shoes we must fill are large, and the responsibilities we will face are great.

How many acupuncturists will it take to meet the challenges that lie ahead? It is a question for which there is no easy answer, but I know that no matter what the future holds for our profession, there will always be space for well-trained and well-educated acupuncturists and Oriental medicine practitioners in this country.

#### *Reference*

1. Grant F. Estimates of U.S. children exposed to alcohol abuse and dependence in the family. *American Journal of Public Health* January 2000;90:112-115.

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