

Reach Out and Touch

These four little words do not seem powerful at first, but they carry a strong message that is appropriate for Oriental medicine. I recently came across a booklet called *The Acupuncture Answer Book*. I was so invigorated after reading it that I contacted the author, Dirk Tousley. Mr. Tousley is a patient of Oriental medicine. He said that he wrote the book to answer some of the questions he'd had, as well as to answer some of the most common questions about acupuncture. He said we must reach out and touch people one person at a time to deliver the message about acupuncture. This idea has been in my thoughts ever since I spoke with him. I'd like to share with you some examples of the power those four words can have.

In last month's issue, I informed you about HR 747, the Federal Acupuncture Coverage Act of 2001. If the bill were to pass, it would include acupuncture services in the Social Security Act. Specifically, it would provide for Medicare to reimburse for acupuncture treatments for deferral employees. Have you reached out and touched your representatives in Washington? Have you sent that all-important letter, phone call or e-mail address urging them to support HR 747? If the answer is yes, thank you for your support. If you haven't contacted your representative, what are you waiting for? Now is the time to reach out and touch the person who represents your interests on Capitol Hill.

On July 23, the California Acupuncture Board's Educational Competencies and Outcomes Task Force met at Emperor's College in Santa Monica and conducted a day-long discussion. Every element of the profession was represented, with more than 20 members of the task force in attendance. Each of the California-approved schools had a member on the task force, as did the Acupuncture Guild and the Council of Colleges of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine.

The agenda for the meeting centered around one question: What competencies and standards of education and training should be in place for a licensed acupuncturist who is just entering the profession? Historically, it has not been easy for members of the board to come a specific agreement, but this time the meeting was well facilitated with clear ground rules. As one panelist described it, "This was a good discussion." Nearly everyone at the meeting had varying opinions, but the important thing is that everyone reached out and touched the issues to discuss them with others on the task force and in the audience.

Just a few weeks ago, graduation ceremonies were held at Samra University of Oriental Medicine in Los Angeles. I was one of dozens of people in attendance. The speaker, a medical doctor from the Los Angeles area, encouraged the graduates to reach out and touch their patients with compassion, understanding, hope, assurance and reinforcement.

Recently, two students who just graduated from Pacific College of Oriental Medicine relocated to the eastern part of the country to begin practice. Upon arriving on the east coast, they organized a group of presentation folders and called my office to inquire about acquiring extra copies of *Acupuncture Today*. When I asked them what they would use the extra copies for, they responded that they were

trying to reach out and touch the medical doctors in their area, and wanted to include copies of *AT* in the presentation folders for the MDs to read. As a result of their reaching out, the local hospital has made a place for them and their practices, including a guaranteed referral base. This shows that when you make an effort to contact the medical establishment as these two students did recently, the response to that effort is becoming more and more favorable.

Just this past month, I received a phone call from Empire Blue Cross/Blue Shield in New York. A representative at the company was looking for information on electroacupuncture and had been rather unsuccessful in finding any articles on the subject. The representative also said that because it was considered a "new" procedure and there wasn't any information available, it wasn't reimbursable under the BC/BS insurance plans.

I contacted Michael Devitt, *AT*'s managing editor, and asked him to look into it. Within a day, Michael was able to track down, print out and mail to me six scientific articles published on electroacupuncture in the past year, as well as a list of more than 50 abstracts published in the last 18 months that Blue Cross/Blue Shield could read and use to formulate a basis for payment. BC/BS reached out to the acupuncture profession for more information; I reached out to Michael for help; and together, we were able to produce just what the insurer was looking for.

Last but not least, in August, *Acupuncture Today* exhibited at the California State Oriental Medical Association (CSOMA) meeting in San Francisco. Hundreds of practitioners and dozens of vendors were in attendance. While I was unable to attend the conference due to a prior engagement, Michael and two members of our advertising department (Paula Evans and Jack Bell) were able to reach out and touch the members of the profession they serve. It was an excellent opportunity to interface with students and practitioners of Oriental medicine, and from all accounts, the response to that opportunity was outstanding. According to Michael, several practitioners came by to shake hands and remark on how much they enjoyed reading the publication. More people stopped by *Acupuncture Today*'s booth and either signed up for a free subscription or offered to submit an article for publication at the CSOMA meeting than at the last two acupuncture meetings combined.

Who have you reached out and touched recently? If you haven't tried it, now is the time to do so.

Reach out to your patients and explain the benefits of acupuncture; the more information they have, the easier it is for your patients to explain those benefits to friends and family. Reach out to other practitioners in your area; it will improve the lines of communication and could lead to networking opportunities you didn't think existed. Reach out to your legislators and let them know how they can insure that acupuncture and Oriental are properly protected under the law. And reach out to the medical community; if nothing else, it will provide those practitioners with information and knowledge about another form of healing.

Together, we can make health care better in this country. We have so much to offer. All it takes is for you to make that first step -- to reach out and touch.

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