

Looking Back, Moving Ahead, and Working Together: Lessons for Us All

This issue of *Acupuncture Today* marks the completion of our fifth year of publication. It also culminates our first five years of serving the acupuncture profession with news and views about what's happening in acupuncture in Oriental medicine, where things are happening, and who is making these things happen. A huge "thank you" goes out to everyone who has written for *Acupuncture Today* this past year, and to those of you who have contributed to the publication for the past five years. Whether you're a columnist, contributing author, vendor, or one of our constant readers, you all deserve our sincere thanks, and we wish you all the best in the holiday season.

When one looks back over the past five years in the profession, one can see that we have experienced our share of ups and downs. Generally, though, the profession is moving ahead.

The acceptance of acupuncture appears to be growing at the rate of about one percent a year. One study, published by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine in May, found that more than 2.1 million American adults had used acupuncture at least once in the last 12 months; more than 3 million had tried *tai chi* or *qigong*; and more than 38 million used "non-vitamin, non-mineral, natural products" such as herbs. Almost one-quarter of the people who tried acupuncture did so at the suggestion of a medical professional. That's higher than several other forms of healing listed in the survey, including chiropractic, naturopathy and homeopathy.

Another recent study out of Stanford University showed that about 4 percent of the adult population in the United States uses the services of acupuncturists and Oriental medicine providers. That's probably not as fast as most of us would have liked, but progress is progress, and it's better to move forward than it is to stand still or lose ground.

The most encouraging news comes from a survey published by the Kaiser Family Foundation and Health Research & Educational Trust on health benefits for employees. The survey found that 47 percent of companies now include acupuncture as a covered health benefit, up from 33 percent just two years ago.

Taken together, these reports show the strides our profession has made in the last few years, while also showing the amount of work that remains to be done. Other health care providers (and many insurance companies) are finally beginning to realize the value our medicine has to offer. It seems that every month, a new journal article is published, or new findings are presented at a scientific meeting, that validate what we do. There's no reason why we can't use that information to our advantage. Having good information is one thing. Now's the time for us to step up and do something with that information.

One person who is doing something about it is Fred Lerner. I'm going to share with you a little story about Dr. Lerner and a party that was recently held in his honor. It was a small adventure that began a

couple of months ago, but one that has taught me a great lesson.

In September, I received a phone call from Dr. Lerner's wife, who told me about an upcoming surprise birthday party. About a week later the invitation arrived. It came in a square brown folder, which contained an old 45 record with a new hand-made label. Dr. Lerner was turning 50, you see, and what better way to celebrate his 50th birthday than to have a party with a 50s theme?

The record label contained all the usual information, but also information about gifts. For the party, instead of bringing him presents, Dr. Lerner's family had decided it would be nice to donate gifts to a wives' and children's shelter. The label provided a whole list of items that could be used by those in need. It was a great gesture.

The party was a complete surprise, and the guest list was full of wonderful people. We enjoyed a great meal, and everyone was quite social. This is where the integration of Eastern and Western medicine really taught me a lesson.

After a visit from Marilyn Monroe, who serenaded us with her syrupy voice, we heard some words of wisdom from Neal Miller, LAc, about how Fred has changed the lives of all the acupuncturists he has touched through his program on acupuncture and orthopedics, and his unending and unselfish efforts on behalf of the Oriental medicine community. We then heard from Dr. Ted Goldstein, head of orthopedic surgery at Cedars-Sinai Hospital. He was both funny and at the same time touched our heartstrings. He said that while he does not know what Fred does, he has helped thousands of patients over the past years. Dr. Goldstein thanked him for caring and helping many of his patients.

This is indeed the true state of integrating the medicines by celebrating together. By working together, we can accomplish far more than we could by acting individually. Thanks, Fred, for a great lesson and lots of fun. And to all of you, have a safe and happy holiday season. See you next year!

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