

## UNITY: United Now in Teamwork - Yes!

I sincerely hope you have read the article on the front page of this issue of *Acupuncture Today* regarding the American Medical Association's newly formed "Scope of Practice Partnership," which has been established to investigate the validity of complementary and alternative medicine. That's a nice way of putting it. If you analyze the not-so-fine print, it's apparent that the AMA intends to fight tooth and nail to prevent the expansion of CAM professions, including taking whatever steps are necessary to prevent licensure efforts.

If this is not a wake-up call for the Oriental medicine profession nationwide, I don't know what is. I vividly remember when the AMA formed its Committee on Quackery and went after the chiropractic profession. Well, they are at it again, but this time, the committee is focusing on all of the CAM professions, including acupuncture and Oriental medicine. (How the AMA, essentially representing less than 200 years of formalized allopathic medicine, can have the audacity to control a healing tradition that dates back thousands of years is beyond me.)

I have just returned from Korea, where Jeannie Kang, LAc, and I represented the AAOM at an informal consultation of the World Health Organization (WHO). This informal consultation was attended by the major countries in the Pacific Rim. There were delegations from mainland China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam and Australia. Even though the United States is in a different region of the world, the AAOM received an invitation to send representatives. Jeannie Kang was granted the status of temporary advisor and was appointed as a reporter for the meeting; I attended in the role of observer and media relations representative.

This august body was led and guided in discussions by Dr. Seung-Hoon Choi, Regional Advisor in Traditional Medicine, WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific. As the group began its initial discussions, many varied opinions were brought to the table. Each country's delegation presented a report about Oriental medicine in their country, bringing with them their own ideas about the medicine, its name and practices. The opinions varied widely, as do the countries. But as the sessions progressed, so did the delegations. Eventually, each delegation demonstrated its willingness to share both their ideas and titles for this kind medicine practiced by thousands of CAM providers in the countries where Oriental medicine has its origins and roots.

These delegations were composed of officials from the national governments, as well as professors and practitioners of Oriental medicine. They represented numerous countries, different cultures, different languages, and very different styles of Oriental medicine and its many forms of utilization. The delegations met, they worked, they discussed, they compromised, and they finally reached a consensus on a common title: Traditional Medicine.

So, if this type of consensus can happen between countries, what do we have to do in the U.S. to create consensus and unity among the providers in this profession?

In the United States, the acupuncture and Oriental medicine profession is the only one divided along ethnic divisions; everyone is in their own little society. In California, there is a situation wherein one group of licensed acupuncturists is actively lobbying against a bill from another group of licensed acupuncturists, even though the bill would benefit the entire profession. In my opinion, this type of behavior must stop. There must be consensus and unity; there must be a united front when speaking to the legislators, lest confusion occur and they walk away from all of our efforts.

In Connecticut, there is no state organization; licensed acupuncturists there don't talk to each other because they are afraid someone will take one of their patients. Have we not yet figured out that only 9 percent of the population is served by the Oriental medicine profession, which leaves 91 percent who have not experienced acupuncture and herbals services? This tells me there is no shortage of sick people in the U.S. in need of your services.

How do we begin to build unity? Here are two suggestions. First, call another acupuncturist in your immediate area and offer to trade services with them. In this way, you both get treatment and will feel better and stronger, but more importantly, you will establish relationships with fellow providers that can only be beneficial down the road.

Second, participate in the organizational framework of the profession. You can start by joining your state association, if you have not already done so. If your state does not have an association, form one. You can contact AAOM Executive Director, Rebekah Buckles, for help and guidance in forming a state association. Then join a national association and get involved.

It's time to create a unified profession, provider by provider, that can help the countries of the Pacific Rim and elsewhere share this valuable medicine with the world. It's time to create a unified profession that can stand up to the AMA's outrageous "investigation" of the CAM professions. Without unity, threats to your professional existence will go unchallenged and millions of people will go without the remarkable care you provide.

JULY 2006