



BILLING / FEES / INSURANCE

Spreading the Good Word About AOM

AN INTERVIEW WITH BIANCA BELDINI, LAC

Editorial Staff

Perhaps one of the best ways to spread the good word about acupuncture is via mass media. When television viewers saw Oprah Winfrey get an acupuncture treatment last year, it reinforced in their minds not only the efficacy, but also the safety of acupuncture as an alternative treatment - "If it worked so well for Oprah, why not for me?"

Bianca Beldini, LAc, a New York-based acupuncturist, wholeheartedly endorses this idea. She was featured recently in an alternative health segment on "The "Today Show." The Jan. 23 segment can be viewed from her Web site at www.sacredspaceacupuncture.com. Beldini took time out from her busy schedule recently to chat with *Acupuncture Today* about how working with well-known dancers, athletes and Broadway performers can positively affect the profession.



Acupuncture seems to be gaining more and more national popular media attention. How do you feel this affects the perception of acupuncture in the mind of viewers?

I believe that it is sparking positive curiosity. Television, magazine articles and radio broadcasts are all powerful media tools that can optimistically influence the general public's awareness of who we are and what our role is as health care practitioners. Everything from the infamous picture of Gwyneth Paltrow's cupping marks to the infertility treatment scene in "Sex and the City" marks strides for our profession as it exposes us more to the general public.

What is a typical day like for you when you are working with individual performers or athletes?

Here are some of the common complaints I am faced with daily: "I got kicked in the shin during a tackle and, oh by the way, I dislocated my thumb during the game!" "Every time I go up on pointe, I feel a pinching in my ankle!" "I can't kick higher than my waist because I strained my hamstring! How am I going to make it through the show tonight?" "I need to be able to sing full-out for my audition, but I am hoarse and my throat is raw!" These patients need results quickly, and I need to provide relief for them quickly, so my typical day is quite dynamic.

What sorts of treatment situations do you find to be specific to high-level actors, dancers or athletes?

Professional dancers and high-level athletes have three things in common: physical strength,

superhero-like endurance and steadfast determination. However, with these attributes comes excessive wear and tear on ligaments, tendons, muscles and joints. The specific treatments that I use with these patients involve releasing tension throughout their connective tissue (via trigger-point and motor-point needling). Emotional-balancing points are also important in these patients to help them stay grounded, since an injury can sometimes cost them their career.

What are the most rewarding and most challenging aspects of working with well-known celebrities and sports stars?

The most challenging aspect is time. This may mean that they sustained an injury and they have limited time for recovery or their planned time for treatment has been disrupted due to an unscheduled mandatory rehearsal, practice or audition.

The most rewarding aspect for me is to watch them perform on stage or to be able to watch them play their sport on television. One of my most memorable experiences was watching the cast from "A Chorus Line" rehearse backstage before the Tony Awards show last year at Radio City Music Hall in the Rockefeller Center. I then got to meet the cast for their celebratory party after their performance.

How did you get started working with these types of patients?

While I was in acupuncture school, I was working part time as a physical therapist in an office in New York City that treated the Broadway casts of "The Producers," "Mamma Mia!" and "Hairspray." After graduation, I took an acupuncture position in a private PT practice that is known for its specialty in rehabilitation for dancers, which is where I was exposed to the New York City Ballet, other Broadway shows and dance companies within the metropolitan area. Both of these experiences led me toward the opening of my own private practice.

How would you describe your relationship with the athletes and celebrities you treat?

Many of my clients are my contemporaries and I have a multifaceted relationships with them. I am a trustworthy member of their health care team. I am their fan. I am there to help support them when they are feeling physically broken and emotionally drained. Typically, as time passes, I become part of their network of friends.

What is your favorite type of work for these patients?

Many of these patients deal with musculoskeletal issues, so my favorite way to treat these types of patients involves using acupuncture needles to re-integrate structural alignment. I combine my physical therapy knowledge of anatomy with using the needle modality to change dysfunctional fascial arrangements due to repetitive stress and overload.

Do you have any advice for acupuncturists who would like to get involved in treating celebrities and doing work like yours?

First, by living in a metropolitan area you have better luck being accessible to these types of clients. The entertainment business and the professional sports community is a small, tightly knit network where word of mouth travels quickly. So, if you treat one client well, establish a good rapport and help get them back onstage or onto the playing field in a timely manner, they will often tell their colleagues. It is important to them that their "issues" are safe with you and that you are trustworthy.

Funny story: I know nothing about football. I told the wife of one of my clients that I was a bit embarrassed because I couldn't really "talk shop" with her husband when he was in for his treatments. She told me that he actually preferred that I wasn't a crazy fan and that's what made him even more comfortable with me. So, it's not necessary that you know everything about their sport or professional discipline. You just need to share the same goal in their health and recovery.

What's next on your schedule?

After my exposure on "The Today Show," I've been asked to become the official spokesperson for a great new Web site, www.theholisticoption.com. I will also be one of the many practitioners listed on the sites national directory. Launching this spring, this site will provide the public with free, user-friendly information on complementary and alternative treatment modalities, allow users to find practitioners and nearby schools, and enable people to connect with one another on discussion forums. I think it will really increase awareness about holistic medicine in the U.S. and give people health care options that are more natural, preventative and focused on complete wellness.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

This is a really exciting growth period for us in the integrative therapies world. We need to come together as holistic practitioners and work synergistically with each other as a supportive network while communicating positively with the allopathic community.

In the end, isn't it all for the good of the patient anyway?

APRIL 2008