

AAAOM a Hit at National Foundation for Women Legislators' Convention

AAAOM Staff

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Giant strides were taken to ensure health care options for the American public when more than 30 acupuncturists attended the [National Federation for Women Legislators'](#) (NFWL) 72nd annual convention this Labor Day weekend in Albuquerque. These practitioners requested legislative support from the 500+ senators and congresswomen in attendance. Each legislator was given a copy of our research on AOM in the U.S., in addition to a narrative analytic review of the cost-effectiveness of acupuncture and a copy of our AOM model bill. These efforts resulted in the passage of two resolutions in support of AOM. (To view, go to www.aaaomonline.org.)

Our volunteers gave more than 100 treatments to the legislators and received rave reviews about the results of the treatments. The weekend set the stage as a game-changer for our profession. The impact of this political advancement for the AOM profession is, in many ways, equivalent to the clinical advancement achieved with the 1997 NIH Consensus Conference because it will serve as a reference point for those legislators who will be writing the language for future legislation. This work also provides a platform from which to secure and expand our place in the U.S. health care system.

The first resolution passed by the NFWL extended inclusion of AOM providers to all government insurance programs and health delivery programs. It also included provisions to create more qualified primary care practitioners by passing AOM licensure requirements in currently unregulated states and by broadening our scopes of practice in states with licensure acts. The second resolution requested that the government create and fund a herbal safety database for Asian herbal remedies.

The foundation for our success continues to be built on our desire to serve. We provided the legislators with a clear picture of what we had to offer patients by providing hands-on treatments, one-on-one dialogue and presentations that described the obstacles that stand in our way. All the participants were invited to receive services from our LAc attendees, and many were curious and willing to try acupuncture for the first time. Not surprisingly, the legislators' collective experience on the table was

profound and made quite an impression.

We concluded the weekend with dozens of powerful, insightful and dedicated women legislators asking us to help them introduce and pass bills that mandate insurance coverage for acupuncturists and increase the scope of practice in their respective states. The legislators paid close attention to our words about how our medicine can thrive if given the opportunity for proper insurance reimbursement. The NFWL health care policy leadership asked for our input so they can assist in creating sustainable business models with which we can deliver our medicine to the citizens of this country. We explained that our medicine is slowly being integrated into hospital care, home care, group and private practices, community treatment models, nursing homes, hospice and other health care delivery systems. We also pointed out that under current law, we are excluded from the same student loan forgiveness and reciprocity extended to physicians practicing in medically underserved areas. We demonstrated an understanding of our responsibility to the advancement of society, our profession, and the economy. Our message of social responsibility in providing this medicine continues to be critically important in moving our message and our medicine forward.

A significant barrier that persists is our virtual absence in discussions regarding our potential role in the treatment of the variety of diseases traditionally performed by other providers. It seems we lack a consistent language that describes the mechanisms of our medicine, in addition to what we treat. Moreover, when a medical provider discusses treatment options with a patient in the informed-consent phase of their interaction, acupuncture is not mentioned as an alternative. We assert that informed-consent guidelines must include all viable alternatives and that those alternatives must be equally accessible to patients. We advocate that the courts require physicians to introduce viable alternatives to their patients.

As a group, the legislators expressed sincere interest and a desire to fully include AOM in the health care system with the goal of extending care to more patients and underserved populations, including the Native American communities. We saw their appreciation of the role that AOM takes in allowing patients to heal in the safest, least expensive, and most cost-effective way possible. They were also in agreement that patients should be allowed to choose between equally effective treatments. Even though our medicine is not relatively costly, it is currently accessible mainly to the wealthy, even though we consistently slide our scales to the point where the less advantaged can make use of AOM.

We must advocate for the millions of Americans in this country whom could otherwise not afford to receive this care. There are a few simple ways you can help. Financially support the work of your state and national organizations in the form of member dues and make extra contributions when you can. Contact your legislators via [Rally Congress](#) to provide support for the Federal Acupuncture Coverage Act (HR646) and the inclusion of AOM in health care reform. Spread the word to your social networks. Turn your friends, family members and patients into advocates for the profession and teach them how to contribute to the cause by asking them to submit their opinion to their legislator. This takes only a few minutes and will make a difference for all of America, not just AOM.

Our message to the legislators was clear. The talking points we developed from our conversations at the conference can be accessed online at www.aaaomonline.org. Simply look for AAAOM's NFWL Follow-up Report.

