



EDUCATION & SEMINARS

Know Your Business

ATPI Staff

You might think that once you have your degree, you can stop learning and just get on with the business of running your practice. The reality, as it is for so many other things in life, is that we can never truly stop learning and growing. There is an ancient Chinese proverb that states: "Learning is like rowing upstream. To not advance is to fall back."

This brings us to the question of what we might need to continue to learn after graduation. We asked some of the top acupuncture and Oriental medicine educators to give us their top things practitioners should learn after graduating from school.

Have a Head for Business

The top recommendation from educators was to learn about the business of running a business. This can include everything from marketing to networking to determining what sort of practice will be the most rewarding.

Brady T. Chin, LAc, Dipl. OM, who is dean of clinical education at Yo San University (www.yosan.edu) in Los Angeles, sums it up very neatly: "It is an unfortunate truth that the master's program, as it exists, does not devote enough time to business building and marketing. While in school, devote as much time as possible to learning about business, incorporation and tax laws. Even a small amount of study in this area will pay off in spades later."

Business management is the one area where many schools may well be lacking agreed Robert Doane, LAc, with the Lotus Institute of Integrative Medicine (www.elotus.org), based in the City of Industry, Calif.

"Spend the year that you are interning learning everything you can about business management," Doane said. "This is an area where most graduates struggle because the basics taught in school do not usually prepare you to be successful in running a business. Find successful acupuncturists and talk to them about how they started and grew their business. Talk to some practice management consultants and see if you agree with and feel motivated by their training, as great practice management ideas can significantly improve your chances for success!"

Sometimes, it's all about the nuts and bolts of what goes into managing your business. Theresa Dale, PhD, NP, who is founder and dean of the California College of Natural Medicine (www.traditionalnaturopathy.com), located in Oxnard, Calif., feels that some of the basic building blocks to learning to run a business include such matters as marketing your skills and practice, establishing a mission statement and working on goal-setting, either on your own or with any other staff you may have in your practice.

In other cases, simply deciding what sort of practice you wish to have will determine how you eventually run your own business. *Acupuncture Today* columnist Martha Lucas, PhD, LAc, who runs the Colorado Center of Traditional Medicine (www.acupuncturewoman.com) in Denver and lectures around the world on the topic of acupuncture and anti-aging, suggests that clinicians think about, "whether you want to be in private practice, a larger clinic, a partnership, or even do community acupuncture. Each of these settings is dramatically different and your personality may not be a perfect fit for some of them. I advise visiting each type of setting before you graduate so that you have a notion of how each works in the real world."

In addition to educating yourself, our experts also feel that educating prospective patients is very important. Dirk Tousley, of White Dove Publishing (www.whitedovepublishing.com), based in Laguna Beach, Calif., states it very succinctly: "The top three things an acupuncturist must learn is how to educate, educate, educate." Tousley goes on to explain how best to do this: "An educational referral network based on satisfied patients passing authentic acupuncture information to their friends who pass it on to their friends, ad infinitum, is the answer; and there is no shortage of people lacking information. Millions of Americans needing acupuncture more than anything else in the world never consider that ancient healing method because they know little or nothing about it or have false information that keeps them away."

[pb]Master Your Skills

You can have all the business acumen in the world, but it won't amount to much if your skills are not an equal match. This is why all our experts stress the importance of keeping up your skill set.

Lucas explains that it is important for clinicians to be able to answer the "why" questions. She notes, "Our medicine is about finding the root of the presenting problem. You cannot do that using mediocre diagnostic skills. Our medicine will founder in the U.S. without our having the ability to tell patients why they have fibromyalgia, what is causing their acid reflux, why they have PMS, when their depression developed and why, or why they are having fertility issues. Further, not everyone's PMS, for example, is caused by the same thing. 'Prescription TCM' does not work for everyone for every symptom. You can't just look up the points in a book. This is why you must learn and maintain accurate diagnostic skills."

Chin suggests that one good way to keep your skills sharp is to actually go back into the classroom as a teacher: "Review the basics frequently, try to teach a class or two. It is easy to gloss over basic diagnostics and prescriptions. Regular review of point prescriptions and herbal formula construction helps to keep your skills sharp. Teaching has always been my favorite way of understanding a subject thoroughly, so apply at your alma mater or other nearby OM colleges as soon as you feel comfortable."

Other experts got much more specific as to which skills to focus upon. Doane offers, "Learn the proper way to do pulse diagnosis. It's imperative that you advance your skills in pulse diagnosis, as this is the strongest indicator of internal health our medicine offers. I've spent many years and a lot of money studying pulse diagnosis and I can say without any hesitation that training with Zhang Wei Yin, aka Jimmy Chang, was one of the best investments I made. His method is highly accurate, fast and will increase your confidence level tremendously."

Dale also gets down to specifics, recommending that clinicians "diagnose and treat the emotional cause of disease" by using the Five-Element system. She also recommends offering the Five-Element salivary test, which will assess hormone levels and food allergies and look for possible parasites.

Join In

So you have mastered the art of business and of your skills. The next step is to join up with your colleagues to exchange ideas and help advance the cause of acupuncture and Oriental medicine.

Lucas elaborates on this: "Learn about your state and national associations and how they work to protect and elevate our profession. Some states allow other professionals, like physical therapists, chiropractors, MDs and possibly nurses to do acupuncture, while other states are very protective of our profession and it's therapies. Be certain to join and help protect your calling!"

Chin agrees with this, adding, "I admit that I am biased, but I recommend that everyone join at least their state professional organization and, if they can afford it, the national professional organization (currently the AAAOM). This is the best way to understand professional issues and how to get involved in promoting OM legislation."

Continuing the Journey

It may seem that graduation is the end of a long road. However, the journey has truly just started. Keep in mind another famous saying, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step," as you start on your path to a rewarding career.