



EDUCATION & SEMINARS

What Is Missing From Acupuncture Education?

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I received an acupuncture education after I had a health problem and wanted to resolve it with other means. I heard about acupuncture, but was not aware it was a graduate-level education. I did not know the difference between Japanese and Chinese styles. I found all that out, but I also discovered most acupuncturists were solo entrepreneurs having difficulty getting people through their doors.

I work in the business field and teach at a business college so I was surprised, but intrigued. Where was the breakdown occurring? Acupuncturists were so secure in their ability, but mention marketing and a nervous tick resulted. My intrigue led me to see a terrific graduate education lacking in the area of business education and weak alumni networks.

Business Education

There is standardization in most professions. For example, if you are on a business track in college, you will take the following courses: Operations Management, Financial Accounting, Business Law, Statistics and Economics. There are a few more, but no matter what school, in what state, every business management student would have taken these courses. If you pursue an MBA, you would have needed to pass those classes with a certain GPA or take them again.



In comparison, acupuncture schools have no such standardization of their business curriculum. There may be one course entitled Practice Management and, if you are lucky, another supporting course. The classes may include some information on accounting and insurance but not necessarily, and they do not respond to the individual needs and past experience of the student. What is taught is not sufficient. My thoughts are to treat acupuncture students like graduate students and provide them a mini-entrepreneurial MBA with flexibility.

Flexibility originates by offering multiple courses that acupuncture students take over their three to four years. Schools can offer six mini classes, requiring students to take three. Mini classes consisting of either a one-week intensive or over the course of one month. This would not add an extra hardship on the student who is already burdened with a tough curriculum. Some classes that would be necessary are not only Business Law and QuickBooks, but Effective Writing and Grant Writing, along with Negotiations. If acupuncture wants to gain credibility as the leading integrative therapy, acupuncturists will need business acumen to get there. The professors of these classes should be dynamic university or college professors. Since I am from a state with the most secondary learning institutions per square mile, I know there are adjunct faculty available and willing to share their knowledge by using their teaching experience.

The outcome of this would be a well-rounded business education focusing on what the student believes is necessary to succeed in their acupuncture profession, whether it is self-employment or working for an employer.

An example: In my teaching I use role-playing in my class with the students each taking a role. One of my early in the semester role-plays is between a prospective tenant and a landlord. The prospective tenant likes the space; it is in the location they want, but the price is too high. The landlord wants to rent the space because it has been vacant for awhile. My undergraduate students spend an hour negotiating and coming up with a wide variety of solutions. I have done the same role-play with health and wellness practitioners. With many, I have to feed them the different alternatives they can discuss to come up with a mutually agreeable solution.

Alumni

Providing business education at the student level solves one problem, but there are alumni out there who also need the same knowledge. I was told by a Penn State graduate about their strong alumni program. Even freshmen are enticed into joining the alumni organization. They want to make sure they will get the benefits of a strong alumni network that will help them in the future. They will always be linked by the commonality of having attended the same school.

Acupuncture schools should concentrate on the same idea, and part of this could be by offering seminars for alumni and current students. Outside vendors can be brought in for seminars at no cost to current students. Some outside vendors would require a fee; others would provide the service for free in order to promote their business. Some program topics could include: networking, insurance benefits and public speaking.

Alumni, having paid their dues, get free classes and see that the school wants to support their career endeavors and help them move forward. They are also interacting with current students, which can take shape into mentoring or just networking. Either is beneficial.

There may be the temptation to view this as current students versus alumni and see this as a competition. Being part of the same profession means you are all in a fraternity. Mentorship, which may lead to internships or job opportunities is a win/win scenario; the student gains experience and the alumni may learn some new information.

It is the same value for networking. An acupuncture student may have specialized in one area; sports medicine, pain management or women's issues. It's good to open a dialogue with others within your own field so you can give recommendations. For example, I am not proficient in litigation but I have a

network of people I trust to whom I can recommend. There are also other benefits that become open because groups are involved. One of the alumni groups I belong to has negotiated an auto insurance discount for its members. Another one has arranged some travel discounts. This is because the group is large enough to make an impact. Your alumni group can make an impact, too.

Imagine every acupuncture school offering a comprehensive business education and having strong alumni groups. It would aid in promoting the field as professional and capable. It may be revolutionary, but it is necessary for the profession as a whole to take the profession to the next level.

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