



GENERAL ACUPUNCTURE

CSOMA: Building a Statewide Student Network

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For decades, the California State Oriental Medical Association (CSOMA) has been the principal English language professional association for California licensed acupuncturists. Currently, we're the largest state-level professional association in California, and we enjoy a sizeable student membership across the state. At a recent meeting, the CSOMA board committed to building a thriving student network across California acupuncture and Oriental medicine (AOM) campuses. The board believes that active participation within a professional association both strengthens the profession and empowers students as they transition into professional life.

We're currently working with student representatives in Northern and Southern California to shape the vision and to construct the infrastructure for this statewide student network.

The impetus for this effort came from direct requests from students themselves. CSOMA board members routinely guest lecture at California schools, and students are always eager to learn of our work and to access quality information about the professional landscape at both the state and national levels. Our conversations routinely end with students hungry for more information and involvement.

As we've engaged recently with students, we've found ourselves addressing two key questions from them: Why CSOMA? And how can I get involved?

In answering the "why" question, we point to our recent activities and achievements:



Effective Advocacy: CSOMA is the only California AOM professional association with an executive director. Simply put, this allows CSOMA to get more work done, and have greater access to relevant persons and organizations of interest. The association is able to provide thorough, in-depth analysis of political issues, and clearly communicate this analysis to our membership, and regulatory/legislative bodies. We're a respected opinion leader, a voice consistently sought out by the AOM profession and by Sacramento. Our track record has made us one of the first places policymakers call to get reliable information about the issues before them. CSOMA's leadership continues to be instrumental in defeating a variety of proposed legislative measures threatening the AOM profession.

In each of the past three years, CSOMA—working shoulder-to-shoulder with our Asian-language counterparts and with educators in our field—has successfully prevented the passage a bill that would certify "TCM traumatologists" without adequately specifying the educational standards, scope of practice, or standards of care for this new healthcare field. Other achievements include stopping AB 808, a bill that would have reinstated the highly problematic practical exam portion of the California Acupuncture Licensing Examination and CSOMA's support of recent appointees to the Acupuncture Board.

CSOMA has also been a consistent and dependable source for clear information and analysis, free of the misinformation often encountered in the rumor mill. We recently circulated an in-depth analysis of the Affordable Care Act and its impact on California acupuncturists.

Professional unity is a primary way that we can progress as a profession. Unfortunately, our profession has a fractured and disorganized past. In recent years, we've been working hard to find common ground among differing viewpoints. We're a principal leader within the newly formed California

Acupuncture Coalition, a statewide alliance between CSOMA, its Asian-language association counterparts, and AOM educators all working side-by-side to advance our profession in California. We're looking to bring a similar sense of unity to the student community in California. As engaged participants in their chosen profession, students can make their voices heard and shape their professional futures.

In the past year, CSOMA began hosting regular events we refer to as "Pub Talks." We invite a luminary in the profession to present on a topic of interest. These are free, casual events at a local bar or restaurant that provide a social opportunity for learning and networking. In the future, CSOMA plans to offer CE credits to Pub Talk attendees. Our most recent Pub Talk in Los Angeles was focused on developing a California student network spanning the state's AOM campuses.

It's our hope that the Pub Talks will generate interest in a more diverse offering of CE and other local events, which will help to improve the value of membership. Until 2009, the CSOMA Conference and Expo was an annual weekend-long conference that attracted visitors and presenters from across the country. CSOMA intended to replace this one large event with more frequent local events across the state. Unfortunately, we have not yet achieved the reach we are striving for.

CSOMA's answers to students' "How can I get involved?" question have, until lately, been a little sparse. Though we have a seat on the board set aside for a student member, we have not had a formal infrastructure for students to organize themselves. We feel that if we are able to establish a presence at various campuses, this will engender greater professional, social, and political networking. This new forum will allow students to actively participate in enhancing the professional landscape for licensed acupuncturists.

Students from several campuses have expressed interest in forming local clubs or chapters at their schools so that students can stay abreast of topics of interest and work at a grassroots level to advance the profession. We pride ourselves in being a bottom-up organization that responds to the needs of our members. CSOMA has long wanted to form a student organization, and now that the organic interest is present, we are moving forward to meet the demand.

CSOMA is in the process of visiting AOM campuses across the state to engage students in this dialogue. We will provide lunch, answer questions, and co-create the organized network, working with the students to meet their goals and needs. Initially, CSOMA will focus our attention on addressing the interest expressed by students at the American College of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Five Branches University, AIMC Berkeley, Emperor's College of Traditional Oriental Medicine, Yo San University, and Pacific College of Oriental Medicine. Visits to other campuses will follow, especially if students at these campuses step forward to express interest in this endeavor. We're working to identify student leadership at each campus willing to co-create the local nodes in our student network.

As a clearer vision emerges from these preliminary conversations, we intend to host an in-person student convention to formalize the structure and governance of the student network. For students, who wish to be involved, please contact the CSOMA office or the student government at your campus.

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